

University of Montana

ScholarWorks at University of Montana

Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, &
Professional Papers

Graduate School

1996

Looking for hope| Environmental themes in seven speculative fiction novels

Katie Mac Millen

The University of Montana

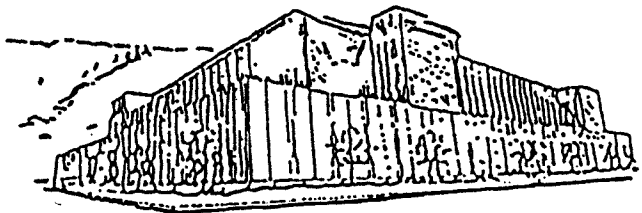
Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd>

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Mac Millen, Katie, "Looking for hope| Environmental themes in seven speculative fiction novels" (1996).
Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers. 2877.
<https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/2877>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.



Maureen and Mike
MANSFIELD LIBRARY

The University of **MONTANA**

Permission is granted by the author to reproduce this material in its entirety, provided that this material is used for scholarly purposes and is properly cited in published works and reports.

*** Please check "Yes" or "No" and provide signature ***

Yes, I grant permission

X

No, I do not grant permission

Author's Signature

Katie (Katharine A.) Mac Miller

Date

29 December 1995

Any copying for commercial purposes or financial gain may be undertaken only with the author's explicit consent.

**LOOKING FOR HOPE:
ENVIRONMENTAL THEMES
IN SEVEN SPECULATIVE FICTION NOVELS**

by

Katie Mac Millen

B.A., Carleton College, Northfield, MN, 1985

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

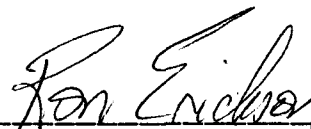
for the degree of

Master of Science in Environmental Studies

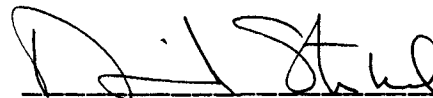
University of Montana

1995

Approved by



Chair, Thesis Committee



Dean, Graduate School

January 2, 1996

Date

UMI Number: EP35789

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



UMI EP35789

Published by ProQuest LLC (2012). Copyright in the Dissertation held by the Author.

Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

All rights reserved. This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code



ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

Mac Millen, Katie, M.S., December 1995 Environmental Studies

RE

Looking for Hope: Environmental Themes in Seven Speculative Fiction Novels

Mac Millen looks for hope for environmentalists within seven science fiction or fantasy novels. Hope is defined as humans treating the animals, plants and the land around them as they would humans whom they respect

By examining how the human societies in these imagined settings relate to the animals, plants, and land around them, she concludes how much each society treats the non-humans around them as subjects or objects and how much agency, selfhood or autonomy each society recognizes in non-humans.

The seven novels in the study are: The Kin of Ata Are Waiting for You, Dorothy Bryant, 1971; Woman on the Edge of Time, Marge Piercy, 1976; Wanderground, Sally Miller Gearhart, 1979; Daughters of a Coral Dawn, Katherine V. Forrest, 1984; Always Coming Home, Ursula K. LeGuin, 1985; Mundane's World, Judy Grahn, 1988; Reefsong, Carol Severance, 1991.

Mac Millen ranks the novels according to how much hope they exhibit, highlights the hope-giving portions of each book, and briefly describes a setting in which animals, plants and the land share equal power, voice and freedom of action with humans.

THANKS

My first and most heartfelt thanks go to my advisor, Ron Erickson, who believed in me and in this project for the six-and-a-half years it took me to work on it. Ron is one of the most gentle, supportive, amused, humorous and helpful professionals of any kind that I have ever worked with. His own love of animals, plants and the earth always buoyed my own; perhaps it was his many years of teaching and a slow and even-keeled personality that gave him the patience to keep bearing with me, as I brought my dream back to him again and again. Besides that, he loaned me a computer so I could finally write the damn thing after he kept asking, "so when am I going to see something written?"

I thank his wife, Nancy Erickson, an artist who created visually the hopes I've seen in my head, a person with her own endless kindness and patience, who quietly asked me how I was doing dozens of times in these years, who has always listened well and endured my social foibles, and who has handled a great many phone messages to Ron without complaining.

I thank Betsy Bach, for being excited about environmental fiction and ecofeminism, agreeing at quite a late date to sit on my committee, and for remaining utterly human and approachable at all times.

I thank Tom Roy for his many years as and fairness in chairing EVST, for admitting and then sustaining me despite any doubts, for continuing to accept my protestations that I would get "it" done, and for sitting on my committee when I finally did get "it" done.

My thanks also go out on a deep level to my father, Larry MacMillen, from whom I was fairly estranged when I began my EVST studies. When I could only toddle, he planned our family trips to the manzanita and madrone forests, to see the banana slugs I loved, to the bay marshes with the clapper rails, the cord grass and the salt grass, and to the beach with its steady, reassuring constancy of the waves and the tides, with the cold ocean water and the tideline of beach treasures, with starfish and limpets and bull kelp. More recently he has supported me financially on and off throughout the years and emotionally through some hard losses, and kept wondering

if I was really developing a thesis or not.

I also thank his wife, Marge MacMillen, for being the sort of person who supported him as he stood by his child.

I thank my lost ecofeminist pal, Janet Henderson, for valiantly developing ecofeminism here in Montana before it had quite reached us academically, for studying some of these books within the strictures of formal philosophy, for opening the pathway to the Institute for Social Ecology where this idea was born, for following her own life as it led her places she least expected, and mostly for hoping and dreaming with me for many years.

I thank Connie Monson for half a lifetime of friendship, for her unflagging sharing of our lives, joys, depressions, mischief, wise insights, herbal remedies, and amusements, for writing poems that fed me through the years, and for pushing and pushing to finish her own theses at the very last dag-nabbed second, showing me that, yes, I could do it too.

I thank Bill Haskins for being the calm, sweet guy he is when I first arrived, lost, in Montana, for his bellowing moos, for a 4th of July in the Sapphires, for fixing my car repeatedly, and for his ongoing friendship.

I thank Deb Notkin and Lisa Hirsch for receiving and sheltering me during one of the lowest slumps in this process, for talking with savory satisfaction about books and writers, their characters and stories and sensations and plots and moods and tenors, and for reminding me that I loved what I was trying to do.

I thank my former boss, Don Artley, for asking me more often "How's your thesis? Are you working on it?" than ever about my work at work.

I thank my first sponsor, Katie Cadigan, who sent me off to Montana with every assurance that I could do and learn what I was looking for here, who said she saw courage in me, and who gave me the book that would allow me to heal and thereby be able to pursue my dreams.

I thank my roommates, Lynne Schoonover and Susan Caldwell, for taking me and my four-legged friends in when we needed a home, for praising me whenever I worked on my thesis, and for rewarding me with good food while I worked.

I thank Marc Passmann for always understanding what I have felt, especially animal- and earth-pain, and then for making Indian food and laughing, dancing, and being bi with me, living our own lives joyously to honor the richness and variety of life on earth.

I thank my current sponsor, Paula Hoffmann, who also kept believing that I could do it, and kept reminding me that this was my heart's desire every time I got caught up in one of the thousand other projects I started along the way, who saw starlight shining on me, and who said those words I had always waited to hear: "I am so proud of you."

And finally, I thank the hundreds of women who loved the earth along with me during this journey, in Earth First!, at Women's Place, in Vermont, among Oakland science fiction fans, and everywhere, every woman who has ever touched and smelled rich loam in awe, pressed against a tree without embarrassment, floated in the ocean numb and trusting, called hellos to unseen forest critters, laughed at pee drops melting into the desert sand, or ever said to me "I want to read it when you're done."

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----|
| Abstract | ii |
| Thanks | iii |
| Introduction | 1 |
| Dorothy Bryant, <u>The Kin of Ata Are Waiting For You</u> , 1971 | 14 |
| Marge Piercy, <u>Woman on the Edge of Time</u> , 1976 | 23 |
| Sally Miller Gearhart, <u>The Wanderground</u> , 1979 | 39 |
| Katherine Forrest, <u>Daughters of A Coral Dawn</u> , 1984 | 51 |
| Ursula K. LeGuin, <u>Always Coming Home</u> , 1985 | 61 |
| Judy Grahn, <u>Mundane's World</u> , 1988 | 75 |
| Carol Severance, <u>Reefsong</u> , 1991. | 102 |
| Conclusion | 123 |
| Works Cited and Consulted | 133 |

INTRODUCTION

Eight years ago, I moved to Montana to join the Environmental Studies program and in some manner become an advocate for the environment, whatever that meant. This study was born a couple of years later at the Institute for Social Ecology in Plainfield, VT, where I went to study ecofeminism for the summer. During my time there I felt more hope for the future of the planet's non-human life than I had in a long time; I was surrounded by others who felt deep inside them that it was imperative to protect and preserve wild places and improve the conditions of animals, whether on an administrative, political, daily-living or activist level.

I realized at ISE that there, and in the EVST department, I was looking for hope more than I was looking for the how-to's of environmental activism. I actually knew plenty of ways I could make a change - what I needed more was another shot of energy to fuel my actions. As I listened and spoke in seminars at ISE, I came to realize that I had a source of hope that no one else seemed to draw on: fiction.

I have always been an avid reader of science fiction and fantasy. Occasionally those genres publish books that stray over into utopian, dystopian, or utopian foreground/dystopian background themes. What I found in Vermont and thereafter was that some of these novels, fitting into the broader category of speculative fiction, had shaped my visions of a hopeful future for the planet. Books that

depicted societies living in close contact with the plants, animals and land around them and considering those non-humans more than we do gave me hope.

Let me clarify the "hope" that I refer to. My thinking goes like this: the state of the planet makes me despair because people regard non-human life and land as objects to own and to use - property. Further, actions based on this sense of property are destroying the planet's species and ecosystems.

The only entities I see that humans do not treat as object or property are other humans whom they consider of equal status. Those people whom one respects, one treats well. Those humans whom one feels are inferior (based on age, color, culture, economic class, education, gender, national origin, race, religious beliefs, sexuality, youth, etc.), one treats poorly - as property or like property.

So for me, hope lies in humans considering non-human life to be of a status equal to the status of humans one respects - and therefore considering non-human lives as subjects rather than objects.

Without quite realizing it, I developed my own vision of human/non-human equality. My imagination painted its own blurry picture of hope. In it, humans are scattered thinly here and there among other creatures. Some bushes, rocks and little human children are playing games together in a dusty clearing. Old forest trees, clouds of

gnats, human adults, spring grasses, a lithe lizard, some blackberry brambles and a black bear discuss what to do about some community changes. Boulders that make up a chimney drone low-toned songs early in the morning to woo a human they have fallen in love with. Vines that are angry with some humans rustle against a house too much at night, bothering them. An old woman sits with a winter ladybug swarm, meditating with them.

In this envisioned world, plants and animals communicate with the humans clearly - there is some common language and way to understand one another. At one time humans may have had to make some effort to listen to, hear and speak with others correctly. When the humans sit around the fire at night and tell stories, raccoons, rocks, mosses, hills, fish and owls may or may not contribute to the stories too; if they do, the humans listen as well to them as they would or wouldn't to each other.

There are no confined or domestic animals; probably there are no confined or domestic plants either, although my blurry picture gets very blurry at that point. Because this is my imagination, the climate is warm and there is plenty of plants for humans to eat. Humans do not hunt or kill each other or other animals. Plants do not experience fear or pain as animals do when pursued or killed, and do not mind being eaten so long as parts of them get to keep growing. I realize this may be a cop-out or actually untrue, but it is the best my imagination can come up with and still have humans alive and eating.

Most importantly, every plant and animal and rock and bit of soil goes about its own existence without interference from humans. The ones with motion, the animals, make their own decisions about where to go and what to do. Humans are there; you live around them. Maybe you like them and share part of your life with them; maybe you don't like them, or ignore them.

If you don't have what animals would consider motion, then you go about your days doing whatever it is that you do: taking in water, putting out oxygen, noticing and observing; or, absorbing sunlight and keeping warm, or splitting and heaving, or eroding slowly. The point is, you are a subject, whether you are land or an animal or or a human or a plant. You are not an object. No being owns or controls another being. You are your own agent, your own self, living out your agency and selfhood.

Humans feel and express humility - that is, they neither consider themselves better than nor worse than the other beings around them. They realize the ways in which they are like and different from other creatures, both as a species and as individuals. Human day-to-day actions are simple: eat, get food, make and maintain clothing, comfortable shelters and good-looking things, play, rest, sleep, socialize, travel, visit, always moving in and among the other beings going about their own day-to-day lives. Humans act as one node in a web - their own beings while part of a larger community.

Just as human adults treat those they respect well by informing each other of their intentions or asking for input, when considering an action that might affect another, so do humans inform and consult with other beings. Sure, humans run into conflict with other individual beings and other species. Creeks might get hopping mad at some stupid human, or a human might get furious with some stupid goat that wandered into her almost-finished sand art, but they shout it out, or go away and pout, or reason things out together - humans and non-humans do not injure or damage each other physically.

I have not consciously used my vision as a ruler or standard by which to measure the books I've read - but I have read them looking for hope that somehow would generally lead in the direction of my vision. My thesis became a way to look for and then pass on this hope, as I found it in the novels I use.

The imagination in these books provides three facets of hope: explicit or implicit criticism of the dominant culture in which their author lives (which criticism implies the possibility of improvement); visions of cultures towards which we might aim; and simple heart's-ease while reading them for those who seek emancipation of non-humans and the natural world..

I break down my search for hope into three more closely-searching questions with which I analyze each book:

- What relationships do the humans have with the animals in the

book?

- What relationships do the humans have with the plants in the book?

- What relationships do the humans have with the land and its ecosystems?

Often I translate these three questions into “how much agency, selfhood and autonomy do the humans of these societies recognize in non-humans, and how much agency, selfhood and autonomy do the non-humans actually exhibit?”

This pre-supposes that humans can see themselves as connected to, rather than separate from, plants, animals and the earth. Feminism posits that dualistic thinking allows us to split any set into two separate and separated halves; hierarchical thinking then assigns a “good” value to one half of the set and a “bad” value to the other. Within human societies, the two halves are “us” and “them.” Those who are not of your half are “other.”

For most westernized [sic] humans, nature and wildness is far more “other” than other humans are; humans are good and civilized, and either need to dominate nature, the “other,” or put “her” on a pedestal and worship “her,” the “other.” Plants, animals and the land and humans are not in the same class, nor even on the same continuum.

In In A Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's

Development, Carol Gilligan's studies show that women tend to look for, see and make connections with other people more than men do. If this is true it would make sense that women would also be more likely to look for, see and make connections with non-human beings than men would. Accordingly, it is not surprising that all of the books I could find that in some way considered non-human's points of view were written by women. In fact, women authored 14 of 15 of the books I considered. Those I chose to use are:

The Kin of Ata Are Waiting for You, Dorothy Bryant, 1971

Woman on the Edge of Time, Marge Piercy, 1976

Wanderground, Sally Miller Gearhart, 1979

Daughters of a Coral Dawn, Katherine V. Forrest, 1984

Always Coming Home, Ursula K. LeGuin, 1985

Mundane's World, Judy Grahn, 1988

Reefsong, Carol Severance, 1991

The chapters of this paper follow this chronological order.

I considered a number of other books which I would like to mention and explain why I did not use. Those I did not use are:

Herland, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, 1915

Les Guerilleres, Monique Wittig, 1969

2150 A.D., Thea Alexander, 1971

Ecotopia, Ernest Callenbach, 1975

Dreamsnake, Vonda McIntyre, 1978

Motherlines, Suzy McKee Charnas, 1978

A Door Into Ocean, Joan Slonczewski, 1986

Walkabout Woman, Michaela Roessner, 1988

I discarded Herland because the women of that society entirely domesticated nature where they lived, and had no interaction with the wild parts of the world around them.

Although I at one time had my hands on and began Les Guerilleres, I did not quickly find any empathetic sentiments towards nature within its feminism, and therefore did not seek it out once my copy moved on with its owner.

2150 A.D. was so didactic and contained so thin a veneer of actual literary substance that I could not read it.

Ecotopia seemed to still have an almost adversarial feel towards the land, despite rhetoric about "the forest." Although the people lived in a natural setting, they did not feel as though they were living with nature, or even among it.

Dreamsnake is a fine novel and one I thoroughly enjoyed, as I have all of the McIntyre work I have read. I concluded that its somewhat positive denouement -- the human cost of human interference in animals' lives -- did not outweigh its primary focus on humans using snakes as vehicles for transmitting medicine. In addition, the setting and remainder of the plot did not contain enough interaction

with or consideration of natural surroundings to warrant Dreamsnake's inclusion. (The first chapter of Dreamsnake was originally published as a short story "Of Mist, and Sand, and Grass" and is one of the most satisfying pieces of short literature I have ever read.)

I had originally intended to use Motherlines. When I began to read it closely, I found that I started feeling depressed rather than hopeful. Much of the book follows a group of women who live in desert-plains, moving about nomadically with their horse herds. The women do not connect with any part of nature except their domesticated, broken horses whom they in some ways revere. However, the women's solution to the drought which regularly strikes their area is to slaughter part of their herds, rather than preventatively arrange both populations to match the patterns of the land around them. I decided I could not glean enough hope from Motherlines to use it.

And, last, I wanted to use A Door Into Ocean and Walkabout Woman. I apologize to these two authors for not applying myself more thoroughly to their work.

I began A Door Into Ocean twice and each time bogged down about three-quarters of the way through it. What I did read of the book pleased me - natives of a water planet living on huge, floating rafts of ocean plants and using organically-derived technology and medicine. However, without reaching the ending and its conclusion regarding off-worlders who are trying to mine the ocean floor, I felt

I could not use A Door. I still recommend it, and hope to push through and finish it.

I deeply regret not using Walkabout Woman. It is one of the most imaginative stories I have read in years, and I fully meant to use it. But the fact that the book is out of print made me unable to find a copy of it in time to study it closely for my thesis.

Roessner has written a rich, engrossing, dreamy story about an Australian aboriginal girl growing up with the land as much her friend as other humans, her transfer to white schools, her adult life as a doctor, and the pull from the land that she feels as an adult, leading her to return to it. I highly recommend Walkabout Woman, and hope to analyze it in the same manner I have the seven books in this study at some point in the future.

Various critics have analyzed the books I did use, especially LeGuin's and Piercy's, looking at them from a feminist angle. Feminist critics have scrutinized women's, men's and children's roles, birth, death, work, sexuality, community, conflict, etc -- a myriad aspects of humanity -- in science fiction at large and in some of the books of this study particularly.

Although ecofeminism -- the study, usually in philosophy, of the parallels between the oppression of nature and wildness and the oppression of women -- might have leant an environmental aspect to these feminist analyses, the critiques I read focused only on human

concerns within the stories and either did not or only incidentally addressed the roles of non-human beings. Mine is an environmental and animal rights analysis, not a feminist or ecofeminist analysis.

Although Sarah Lefanu (Feminism and Science Fiction) comments, regarding The Wanderground, "Women, animals, plants and the earth itself live in a glorious communion of spirit...;harmony is achieved through sweet cooperation," she does not give any specific examples of communion or cooperation, nor mention what human/non-human relations she finds in the many other speculative fiction novels she discusses.

And while Carol Pearson ("The Utopian Novels of Dorothy Bryant, Mary Staton and Marge Piercy") states that "The feminist utopian ideal is a decentralized, cooperative anarchy, in which everyone has power over her or his own life" and that "The basic values of these [feminist utopian] societies are the growth and autonomy of the individual...in the context of relationship with others,- "life" appears to mean only human life, and growth and autonomy apply only to human individuals.

Pearson immediately goes on to accept Piercy's words that the folks in Mattapoissett's "religion -- ideas -- make us see ourselves as partners with water, air, birds, fish, trees," without then investigating how Mattapoissett humans actually act towards those non-human beings.

In *Ecofeminist Explorations* Janet Henderson says "Several feminist utopian novels offer visions of societies... that have somewhat sound relationships with their natural environment" and that "they [show] respectful treatment of the natural world...." She goes on to say of Gearhart's *The Wanderground* "There is a genuine reciprocity in [the women's] relationship with nonhuman creatures and an underlying assumption that such creatures and the land are at least as deserving of respect as humans are, if not more so....Gearhart paints an exemplary picture of how humans might relate to nature in a utopian society."

This is the closest I know of that any critic comes to commenting on human-non-human relationships in the novels I examine. Because Henderson is addressing the many oppressions ecofeminism seeks to heal and end, she does not apply the same scrutiny to the actions between humans and non-humans that makes up the bulk of my analysis. To the best of my knowledge, no other critic has judged the relationships between humans and non-humans in the books I use.

Readers may view my study as one of ethics. However, formal ethics practiced by philosophers does not usually address interpersonal relationships on as small a scale as I do, and does not dwell on the emotional quality of behavioral interactions as I do.

Although I am searching out hope within these novels, I am not looking for that hope in any formal academic philosophy framework.

My knowledge of environmental issues stems first from reading and exchange in the political forum and secondly from academic study in non-philosophy fields.

With that, let's get on with the books themselves!

**DOROTHY BRYANT, THE KIN OF ATA ARE WAITING FOR YOU,
1971**

Summary

Take a macho sexist writer exploiting women in best-selling American novels, have him kill his girlfriend in a sexual rage then drive his car too fast on mountain roads hoping to escape, have him crash said car, and where do you end up? On an island where The Kin of Ata Are Waiting For You. The novel is written in first-person, and the main character remains nameless. He awakens in a dark place, hurt, confused, and unable to understand the language around him. As his health improves, he comes to understand that he is living among a simple people whom he soon scorns.

The Atans with whom he lives spend their days taking care of the food crops in the fields and their nights dreaming. Atans' dreams show the paths they are to take in their slow lives, and dictate their few decisions. Each morning they share their dreams, mostly, it seems, to say and hear them out loud so as to better interpret them.

Although Zeke (a nice harsh Anglo-Saxon name for the man he is initially) tries to attract the attention of planes that fly overhead, and concocts a story to explain his girlfriend's death should he return to 'civilization,' he finds that after his first winter fast and trance, he does not want to go back. Although he isn't sure why, Zeke stays in Ata.

Over the remainder of the book, Zeke finds that his instinctive “donagdeo” [roughly translated as “unflowing,” connoting “unkind” or “unbalanced”] actions -- which include both rape and murder on the little island -- leave him feeling hollow and sick in his soul. Very slowly he begins to try the Atans’ way, searching for his own “nagdeo,” flowing or balanced, course - looking to his dreams for direction, meditating in den-caves when confused or out of balance during the day, and adjusting his pace of work and tasks to what suits him best.

In the course of his conversion, Zeke partners a woman, Augustine, works in the fields, learns the oral stories of Ata, and writes them and their many versions down. Eventually Zeke stops trying to accomplish so much, and settles down into the ebb and flow of the seasons, the winter trance and the spring reawakening. He finds a peace and serenity that seemed impossible at the beginning of the book, and just lives.

At the end of the book, Zeke is “called back” to our world, where he is confused and overwhelmed. He finds that only a few weeks have passed, not the years he experienced in Ata. Although his lawyer tries to persuade him otherwise, Zeke tells the truth about murdering his girlfriend - and realizes that his whole trip to Ata has been to return to our world, to tell us about Ata, and to teach us that we too can find a way to leading a nagdeo life.

Analysis

Because Bryant's The Kin of Ata Are Waiting for You focuses on the spiritual achievements of the main character, and of the Atans with whom he lives, it does not directly address the relationships between humans and the animals, plants and land of Ata. However, such relationships do exist throughout the book, and are fairly respectful, despite not according subjecthood to the "natural other."

Most of the animals we see on Ata, a seabound island with no shore in sight, are companion animals to humans. The animals choose (we are told) a human with whom to keep company. This is their one, mild claim to subjecthood. Augustine, the main character's partner, travels with butterflies and moths in attendance; a young boy is followed by a dog, while an older man is followed by a lamb or sheep; a "black bird" flies wherever one of the older Atans goes; the oldest Atan at the story's beginning carries a kitten on her shoulder. And, eventually Zeke acquires an animal:

"One night, when I had begun to shiver even before it was quite dark, a small brown she-goat with a dark face put its face into the ka [home] between two mats that had loosened. The goat came in. I got up to fasten the mats, and when I returned to my place, I found the goat sitting there. I stretched out my back against it, and it kept me warm. In the morning it followed me outside and after that was never far from my side. 'Your animals has found you,' said Augustine. 'That is nagdeo [good].'"

So, Atan animals occupy something of a middle ground on the spectrum of subject-to-object. On the one hand, neither Atans nor Zeke use the animals in a physical way - no human kills or eats an animal:

"I knew better than to suggest that we eat birds or animals, or even fish. They would have reacted the same ways as if I had told them we should eat the children. When animals died, their bones and skins were taken (after the birds had picked them clean) and used for many things. But no one would have thought of killing any of them."

Neither does any human cage or corral any animal, nor do humans use animals for any industry. On the other hand, none of the storytelling portrays Ata or takes the plot into account from an animal's perspective. Furthermore, the animals do serve the humans' purposes: many are mammals which provide company; the butterflies and moths are described in such a way as to connote their ornamentation of Augustine; and Zeke gets not only warmth from his goat ("I insisted that the goat sleep between us and often pushed it toward her in the depths of the cold nights:), but comfort in a moment of crisis, and does squirt warm goat milk into his partner's mouth while she is pregnant.

This, of course, is only slight utilitarian use of animals when compared to our American culture. In fact, we see very little of the animals of Ata, except as followers of "their humans." There appear

to be no large, predator animals on Ata, so no human-animal conflict develops along those lines. In fact, the only slight human-animal conflict shown is quite gentle:

“On the level surfaces of rock they laid out the fruit to dry. Small children stood near each rock, waving away the birds that came to sample the fruit. ‘Yours is at the top of the tree,’ each child would say as he waved away the birds, most of which were tame and unafraid.”

And, the humans do bring the animals into the kas [homes] with them during the cold winter (the novel does not discuss whether the animals need this extra warmth), to doze and fast among the leaves piled and layered for the humans, and feed them from the limited supply of winter food. All in all, the animals live a fairly free life, and do not suffer any ill treatment. But, they also appear only briefly, in background roles, and do not ever gain subjecthood. As I said: middle ground on the subject-to-object spectrum.

By comparison, how Atans relate to plants is almost entirely utilitarian. Almost all of the plants described are leaves or grasses that Atans have picked to shape or weave into bowls, plates, cutlery, cleaning cloths, tunics, sleeping mats, or ka walls and roofs, petals to throw into the ocean on bath day, or various parts of plants to eat. Plants are purely object. The main exception is the Life Tree:

“[She] sprinkled her little handful of water over the exposed root. The others were doing the same, sprinkling their few drops of water

on the exposed roots or the ground around a great old tree that now stood before us. I had never seen a tree like it. Its roots had spread out for yards beyond the path, and its trunk filled the path, which was at least eight feet wide. Its bark was nearly black and deeply rutted and gnarled. Starting from a height of about five feet, branches twisted outward like a roof, then curved upward. The leaves were broad and thick....”

This is the tree at the center of the twelve spiral-armed walls which make up the village of Ata, the tree at which the la-ka [big-home, or central gathering place] has been built, the tree to which little children tie glowing embers at the mid-winter light-celebration, and the tree at whose base a pool exists which is filled by rain runoff from the runnels in the top of the twelve spiraling walls. As Atans gather each evening to eat and tell stories in the la-ka, each Atan washes his or her face in the pool at the base of the Life Tree and then sprinkles the remaining drops on the roots of the life tree.

However, despite the novel’s frequent mention of the tree, it never develops to explain the tree further, or why it is called the Life Tree. Because the village has been designed, as with all Atan decisions, to realize a dream someone once had, it may mean that the Atans themselves do not know or understand why their village should emphasize the Life Tree. It may be that the Tree serves as an important symbol, representing the heart of the community. Or, it may have some other meaning. Regardless, the Life Tree is the

one plant that has some worth beyond merely utilitarian. It stretches closer towards subjecthood than the animals, in the amount of attention Atans pay towards it, but its role unfortunately remains a mystery.

Aside from the Life Tree, all other plants mentioned in the book serve human purposes. In contrast to American society, however, much of what Atans eat is the fruit of plants rather than the plants themselves. During his initial recovery, Zeke is fed “a sweet, fruity pulp...a pink, pasty substance” and left “a pile of fruit that looked like some kind of green plum.” And later, just before harvest, “Gradually the steps of the la-ka were filled with more and more dried fruits, wrapped bundles of grain, legumes and nuts, until it became hard to find a place to sit for evening stories.” Although Atans pick leaves and grasses from which to fabricate most of their material possessions, and in the winter do dig up root vegetables to eat, plants are perhaps spared the constant growing and killing that we would consider a normal way to relate to plants.

Atans cultivate the plants around them, rather than finding them in their natural occurrence. In fact, the bulk of the daily work described is planting, tending or harvesting fields, orchards or herb gardens. However, Atans do not practice plant growing in the same, highly controlled fashion that western agribusiness does:

“The planting, like the layout of the village, was done according to dreams. There was what looked like a hodge-podge of growth,

nothing planted in rows as I was used to seeing it, an incredible variety of plants all mixed together, planted in rotation at times and in places suggested in dreams. Some plots were individually planted, according to someone's dream of the night before, and large areas beyond the hills, which I felt should be cultivated, were left alone because they had not yet appeared in anyone's planting dreams. Sometimes an area was abandoned for a season or more because it was, in a dream, shown unfit, and that area became the latrine area for the time. I suppose we were fertilizing the soil and helping it to recover for more planting."

And older, or less physically able, Atans spend their days tending herbs planted along the spiral walls of the village. These, too, appear to be planted in a fairly free manner - however, they are planted. So, Atans control and use plants, but do so in moderation when compared to American standards. As with the animals, the novel does not ever take into account their perspective, but also avoids entirely nullifying the plants' natural existence.

As for the land... Kin of Ata makes, surprisingly, no reference to the land itself, and really does not even indicate either Zeke's or Atans' feelings towards or thoughts of the land. Despite living on an island which sounds quite comfortable, the novel's characters do not relate to it. Human-land relations are a void in Kin of Ata.

Overall, I believe the best phrase to sum up Atans' relationships with the natural other would be "benevolent inconsideration." While

they do not love, praise, honor or grant the natural other peer status, neither do they dictate to, enslave, or kill (much), or remove themselves with vast distance from, the natural other. Despite taking up 99% of the focus in the book, the kin of Ata are still far kinder to the world they live in than we are.

MARGE PIERCY, WOMAN ON THE EDGE OF TIME, 1976

Summary

In Woman of the Edge of Time, a culture in the future reaches back telepathically to bring Connie, a poverty-level Puerto Rican woman in Chicago, to visit them. The story contains two lines: that of the here-and-now, in which Connie tries to protect her niece and instead is institutionalized by her family, spending the duration of the book in a state psych ward; and that of the future to which Connie metaphysically escapes. My focus is on the future setting, not that of Connie's entrapment.

As with many other of the novels I investigate, Woman follows a "stranger in a strange land" theme. Luciente, the "sender" from the future, whom Connie has "caught," acts as Connie's host in the future world. Connie's visits Mattapoissett, Luciente's village, which reveals a small, nearly self-sufficient, largely agrarian and highly social community. Daily living consists of tending crops or herds, making art, taking care of babies' needs, or supervising children. Everyone of all ages, very young children and very old people alike, share in the tasks necessary to have shelter, clothing and food. Almost everybody knows everybody else, villagers visit other places regularly, and parties are constant events.

Over the course of Connie's stay, she observes not only daily life but the "government" of lot-picked citizens and the ongoing war against

the remaining power-over, consume-consume culture. At one point she mistakenly visits an alternative future and discovers why Luciente and Mattapoissett are engaged in a time-research project. The other future she visits has physically modified humans, particularly women, into strict classes and roles within a hierarchy ruled by powerful men who allow little or no choice of action in other classes. Mattapoissettans (Matta'ns) hope to contact receptive people in the past to persuade them, standing at various crossroads, to choose cultural ways that respect all classes and races of people, consume fewer resources, and share them more evenly.

Analysis

I read Woman on the Edge of Time, and met the village of Mattapoissett for the first time, when I was about 20. For a dozen years I wanted to live there - the people were warm and friendly, gardens straggled and climbed among all the houses, everybody had plenty to eat and wear, the arguing was constructive and the festivities many... A Matta'n states "We are born screaming 'I!' The gift is in growing to care, to connect, to cooperate. Everything we learn aims to make us feel...connected to all living. At home."

It's a considerate, comfortable place - if you're a human. But let's take a look at the catalogue of animals we encounter in Mattapoissett: whales, dogs, roosters, cows, chickens, goats, ducks, pheasant, partridges, turkeys, guinea hens, geese, rabbits, turtles, pigs, fish, cats, birds, ants, butterflies, bees, mosquitoes, mice,

deer, bear, flounder, herring, alewives, 'spinners,' pigeons, carp, swordfish, chipmunks, sable, fireflies, squirrels, whippoorwill, sheep, jellyfish, caterpillars, slugs, worms, shrimp, crabs, clams, beetles, spiders, donkeys, hoopoes, and trout. That's 50 different types of animals.

But what roles do these animals play in this society which is so egalitarian for all races and ages of people? The village Mattapoissett "raises" commodities: chickens, ducks, pheasants, partridges, turkeys, guinea hens, geese, goats, cows, rabbits, turtles and pigs, and "exports" products: flounder, herring, alewives, turtles, geese and ducks. It and the surrounding villages "breed" 'spinners' to act as fences, curtains and perhaps bridges for the people of those sites. The villagers eat butter, honey, fish, milk, yogurt, cows, seafood, swordfish, goose, turkey, shrimp, crab, clams, while Matta'ns wear deerskin and sable. Mattapoissett architects build pigeon coops and carp ponds. People who have committed crimes may volunteer to herd sheep as punishment for their acts. Daily tasks include checking the fish domes, "farming" the fish "herds" off the coast, setting out bees, or picking caterpillars and beetles off of crops. When Jackrabbit and Bolivar travel far from Mattapoissett to visit Crete, they join the native people in riding donkeys.

No matter how much Piercy's characters claim that "our...religion -- ideas -- make us see ourselves as partners with water, air, birds, fish, trees," Matta'ns accord animals utilitarian value only. In

Mattapoisett, and elsewhere, animals are objects, useful to humans.

We, the readers, actually see little of the raising and none of the killing of the many domestic animals mentioned in Woman; it may be that a lower incidence of powerless feelings and resulting violence within the human population -- and decentralized business and a barter system -- make for a kinder treatment during captivity than what America relies on today. But, the fact remains that almost all Mattapoisett animals are domestic rather than wild, are captive, and live only to be slaughtered.

There are some exceptions to this: one of the significant passages in the book occurs when Connie, the visitor from the past, does not realize Tilia, a cat, is making friendly overtures towards her. Connie ignores Tilia, and Tilia in turn thinks Connie is "stupid" and "hostile." Luciente, Connie's Matta'n host, explains how to meet a cat and which animals use a sign language that humans can employ. Tilia shows quite a lot of agency.

Despite the enjoyable dark humor and welcome 'personhood' [sic] Tilia-the-critic provides, Luciente unfortunately negates this sole passage of animal agency by explaining that Matta'ns so cherish inter-species communication that one of Mattapoisett's many holidays is "Washoe Day," celebrating "a chimpanzee who was the first animal to learn to sign between species." But what inter-species respect is there in creating a holiday which honors a wild animal being brought into captivity and conditioned to learn to sign?

The Matta'ns one foray into animal agency lands flat on its face when it goes on to honor a history of captivity and enslavement. This is particularly ironic in light of the characters' constant sorrow over and righteous anger at Connie's captivity and object status, and their heartfelt attempts to help her to freedom and empowerment.

When Connie in turn questions what impact communication between humans and animals has had on people's eating habits, Luciente assures her that "It's changed our diet....We [eat meat] on holidays...as a way of culling the herd. We say what we're doing. They know it." Their conversation passes on from there, having implied that conditions are good for animals. While I do believe that it's nicer for chickens, ducks, geese, cows and goats to run free in Mattapoisett (which they seem to), as opposed to caged, fenced or bound as they do in our world, I can't agree that "we say what we're doing... they know it" makes an animal feel fine while being caught and slaughtered.

If someone walks up to me and says "I'm going to kill you" and I know that fact, I will still experience terror and do my best to escape until I am immobilized. Again, the parallel between animals in Mattapoisett and Connie's situation is strong: the more she realizes the psych ward doctors' intentions, and that her family will not protect her, the more terrified she becomes. Eventually she does try to escape, fails, and herself is caught and once again captive in the state hospital. Whether she is more or less fortunate than Matta'n animals, for receiving unwanted and experimental brain-

control surgery rather than slaughter, I leave it to my readers to decide.

Once having discussed the not-very-different changes in slaughter Matta'ns have made, Luciente goes on to explain that Matta'ns eat meat only on holidays; this does not help animals' situation: "We have around 18 regular holidays, maybe another ten little ones, and then the feasts when we win or lose a decision and when we break production norms." At a minimum of 30 holidays a year, Matta'ns eat meat about once every 12 days. -

In fact, Jackrabbit boasts "We have tens and tens of holidays" - for the humans. In Piercy's world, a celebration for humans means the butcher block for an animal; and everyday meals include fish and shellfish, whose deaths Luciente apparently does not consider in her holiday discussion. Plus, a visitor from Rio Grande in southern Texas remarks "We eat plenty of meat too, not like here, where they think one skinny cow makes a fiesta!" - elsewhere, we know that animals are eaten more frequently.

Despite the overwhelming emphasis on animals as food, some do get to just "be:" dogs and cats show up several times, and appear to be unconfined. Birds fly free, although pigeons do roost in the children's house. Mice and rabbits exist - both are portrayed as playthings for cats. The phrasing "pick off" makes Matta'ns appear not to kill beetles and caterpillars on their crops, and ants, butterflies, worms and spiders are similarly left alone. Mosquitoes

fly free, although Luciente comments “we bred out the irritant,” placing them at least for a time, and as a species rather than individually, in object status.

And all this, even though the town council of nearby Cranberry, and presumably others, includes an “Animal Advocate,” chosen by lot from among those who have dreamt of the position. Like the animals themselves, the advocate is never heard from in the book. Out of the original 50 animals living in or around Mattapoisett, only five live wild, unfettered, undomesticated. One character is “a student of blue whale;” when a youngster goes on her coming-of-age solo, one of her mothers teases her about being eaten by a bear; since deer are not mentioned as domestic animals, it seems as though the deerskin clothing described must have come from wild deer; and, chipmunks and squirrels run in the trees near the village. All are mentioned only in passing, but these five make up the contingent of naturally-occurring wildlife. If you are one of them, and are not hunted, you may get to have a self in Mattapoisett.

And plants? Matta’ns talk about and spend more time with plants than they do animals, and discuss them with more respect. The many descriptions of the countryside, and villages, and meals eaten therein, include zucchini, corn, carrots, tomatoes, potatoes, cucumbers, pumpkins, lima beans, squash, wheat, orchards, apples, cherries, blackberries, mulberries, etc. Roses and wisteria grace buildings, and phlox, lilies, marigolds, nasturtium and asters appear in gardens. Because we see various characters spending more time

among the crops than with animals, it appears as though Matta's feel more connection to (not 'with') plants than animals, and that plants are less "other" than animals - curious, since plants are less closely related to humans than animals.

However, as with animals, the bulk of plants mentioned are mentioned as food. Now, remember, Mattapoisett still holds a great appeal for me, and one of the reasons is the abundant food: the novel spends a great deal of time addressing—having enough food for decided-upon population. But, not only are almost all plants that appear vegetables or fruits raised by humans for humans, but much of the time that the characters discuss food, they are discussing how to "improve" foods genetically or through breeding.

Although Luciente, and Bee and White Oak, two other sympathetic characters, stand strongly against genetically affecting humans in any way but removing birth defects ("We don't think people can know objectively how people should become. We think it's a power surge"), in opposition to 'Shapers' who "want to intervene genetically [with humans]" and "breed for selected traits," the whole culture of Mattapoisett and beyond - as evidenced by the articles, talks, jobs, and bulletin board notices - takes it for granted that breeding and genetically altering plants is a fitting way to relate to them, and are ordinary and unquestioned tasks for humans.

The shaper argument advertises: "Do you value yourself lower than zucchini?," implying that it is to zucchinis' benefit to be 'shaped,' and would be advantageous to people too. Shapers value genetic selection in humans in the same manner as the wider Matta'n culture values it in zucchini. The advertisement reveals the value that genetic alteration of plants holds in Mattapoisett.

And, in part because Luciente as the main character is a plant geneticist, much of the actual discussion of plants is that of experimenting on them: "I'm working on a strain of zucchini resistant to a mutant form of borer that can penetrate the fairly heavy stalks bred fifteen years ago," and "Attempts to increase nutritional content in winter grain (Triticale siberica) suitable short season northern crops maintaining insect & smut resistance. Promising direction," "Liriope...a plant we were breeding for erosion control on the old blast sites," "we've bred many races of vegetables resistant to drought..." and "...in the experimental fields...Luciente was recording comments on performance. 'I think we found some good strains to work on next year.'" Rather than Matta'ns enjoying plants as they exist naturally, plants must "perform" for Luciente and her peers.

The only flower we spend any time with is a rose which Luciente has bred: "I bred that...Big sturdy white with dark red markings and an intense musk fragrance, subzero hardy...I bred back into Rugosa using Molly Maguire stock." Luciente is proud of the rose as a product she has created. Even wild plants she views in a proprietary and utilitarian sense: "...think of every patch of woods as a bank of wild

genes....We need that wild genetic material to breed with," although she does add, "That's only the answer from the narrow viewpoint of my own science." Even plants which are not picked to be consumed may be picked to be worn, as Luciente does her rose, and other characters do elsewhere, "trailing flowers in leis and in hair and beards."

In fact, the appearance of wild plants is about as scarce as the appearance of wild animals. Connie sees willows while traveling between villages, and maples in Mattapeisett. And even though one teen spends her coming-of-age solo week in "one of the wilderness areas we use," no character ever mentions these areas further, or describes what lives there. Matta'ns treat plants as they do animals, objects to be used as food or decoration - or erosion control. Despite the undeniably kind attention Matta'ns give their gardens and farms, plants don't get even as much agency as Tilia, the cat, gets.

Matta'ns' thoughts and feelings about the larger ecosystem are more taking-into-account than they are of plants and animals - unlike the Animal Advocate, the Earth Advocate actually gets to say something: "Seems to me [clearing some of the woods on Goat Hill] cuts into the catchment area for rain water. We have none too much water, people." Even though Matta'ns' consideration seems often to be based on assuring themselves enough resources, they at least do consider: Bee claims "Your scientists...were brought up through a course of study entered on early never to ask consequences, never to

consider a broad range of effects, never to ask on whose behalf..." while Luciente tells Connie "'in biosystems, all factors are not knowable.' First rule we learn when we study living beings in relation."

In particular, Matta'ns seem to feel more emotional about the land and environment around them in a way they ever do about plants or animals. This shows up in part in the songs they sing: "Someday the past will die/the last scar heal/the last rubbish crumble to good dirt/the last radioactive waste decay/to silence/and no more in the crevices of the earth/will poisons roll...Sweet earth, I lie in your lap/I borrow your strength/I win you everyday...Someday water will run clear/salmon will thunder upstream/whales will spout just offshore/and no more in the depths of the sea/will the dark bombs roll...Sweet earth, I lie in your lap..." and "Only in us do the dead live/Water flows downhill through us/The sun cools in our bones/We are joined with all living/in one singing web of energy/In us live the dead who made us... In us live the children unborn/Breathing each other's air/drinking each other's water/eating each other's flesh as we grow/like a tree from the earth," and "Thank you for fruit/we take what we need/other animals will eat/thank you for fruit/carrying your seed/what you give is sweet/live long and spread."

Although these may contain androcentric wording such as "I borrow your strength/I win you everyday," "Only in us do the dead live/...in us live the dead who made us," and "we take what we need," they

illustrate a number of layers of interconnectedness with and awareness of nature.

Matta'ns have built their town on a site close to the tidal river, but have avoided building in wetlands, knowing them to be fragile and wanting to keep them safe and whole. They have built their buildings above the ground, to accommodate the seepage, rather than try to change the land itself. Although they have the technology to change weather, they do not do so for fear of unforeseen consequences. Rather, they deliver food as needed for the duration of droughts, or bring in the harvest early and batten down objects when a hurricane comes. Further, they enjoy the seasons and changes in weather as they come, and keep time with sundials and water or tidal clocks.

And the names! Although in action Matta'ns show almost no connection to animals, the names each of them takes almost always come from the land: Bee, Jackrabbit, Dawn, Peony, Morningstar, Tilia, Otter, Hawk, White Oak, Thunderbolt, Panther, Dark Moon, Blackfish, Swallow, Aspen, Luna, etc. And they in turn "give back" to the land, the Matta'n phrase for dying. Death is an event in which Matta'ns clearly show they do care.

In the course of the story, two significant characters die, one of them an old woman, a storyteller named Sappho, and the other, a young artist, Jackrabbit. Sappho decides when and how to die, arranging to be set up under a tent covering, open to the rain and the

wind, near the river so that she can hear it, and to let her life flow out of her exactly as the tide goes out to its farthest ebb. Luciente comments "Eighty-two. A good time to give back....Everybody gives back. We all carry out death at the core. If you don't [know] that, your life is hollow, no? This is a good death." Later, she says "We are made of elements ancient as the earth, and we owe those elements back to the web of all living." At Jackrabbit's death, the grief facilitator ends the night-long grieving session by saying "Sun up. We have to give our friend back to the earth." Commentary throughout the book acknowledges humans coming from and returning to the land.

Although Jackrabbit dies suddenly and violently, both he and Sappho are buried in such a way as to return those elements. Each is placed on a plank and buried directly in the ground. No formaldehyde and rouge here. Survivors plant a tree at the top of the grave, much as in the death/life song above, "eating each other's flesh we grow/like a tree from the earth." Furthermore, Sappho chooses her tree on behalf of non-human others, saying "plant a mulberry tree for the birds that love fruit." When Connie balks at the Matta'ns different view of health and life, Luciente asks her keenly, "Is dying itself a problem?"

Aside from death, the other arena in which Matta'ns clearly consider the land around them is when they extract, distribute, and consume resources. Although they do manufacture clothes, pillows and kenners (mini wrist computers), mine materials, and raise babies

using sophisticated technology, their energy comes from a combination of windmills, solar panels and other heat collectors, methane gas from composting waste, waves, river water, wood alcohol and wood gas. Even the sum of these is a fixed amount, and bargained for. Roofs are built to collect rainwater in cisterns - hopefully not so much as to deplete the land of a what would otherwise soak in.

Houses in the ex-cities are broken down to small bits, and buildings in the villages are built out of a variety of recycled materials. Paths are paved with flagstones, clothes hang on lines, dishes are made from pottery or glass, baskets and hats are woven, furniture is made of wood or large grasses akin to bamboo, people-wings for toys dissolve when they land in water, diapers and baby-wipes are made from corncobs and cornhusks and can be composted, holiday costumes are made of algae and natural dyes, also to be composted immediately after use - almost all items stay relatively unprocessed, and can be or are returned to the earth. When Connie asks about throwing things away, Luciente replies "Thrown away where? The earth is round."

Transportation ranges from walking to bikes to "floaters" that use a balloon and paddle system to the "dipper" that rides on a cushion of air over the natural terrain. Little area is paved.

The people, gathered together by lot to form an ever-changing government, argue about cement, zinc, tin, copper, platinum, steel, gravel and limestone - what is the allowable amount to extract of

each, and what needs will make the most of its use? The same is true for the “use” of the land. A long passage is devoted to arguing about whether to clear some woods outside of a village or not. The participants discuss the entire history of the land, through its wild and its cleared times, and what would happen to the surrounding system if it were cleared. At one point, one of the opponents to clearing it says “let us not be cavalier about water,” and Luciente remarks that decision-makers often choose to visit a site before deciding how to act towards it. Ultimately, they elect not to clear the woods in question, but to find a way to increase production of the already-cleared land - without depleting the soil of that land. “We have limited resources. We plan cooperatively. We can afford to waste nothing...”

At the same council meeting, members acknowledge that already-processed resources are available too, and that the villages may not be making the most of their use: “The old bridge is beautiful, three hundred years old, of real wrought iron” vs. “ Nobody...has bled from the old bridge being out...[it's] pretty, but our freedom may depend on jizers.” The critic seeking the bridge’s iron is told “Weren’t you advised last year to look out for alloys that use up less ore?” It is questionable whether land can continue to be pushed to increase production, or engineering can create such alloys, and no characters ever challenge the fundamental level of technology which Matta’ns “need.”

However, Matta’ns do seem to try hard to consume few materials and

use what they consume to its fullest, although they still live a life that includes significant technology: "Objects we make for daily use, we make to last. It would be a pity to use up scarce copper or steel on a machine that worked poorly," and "what we do comes down on everybody [read, all humans]. We use up a confounded lot of resources. Scarce materials. Energy. We have to account. There's only one pool of air to breathe."

As opposed to what appears in close examination of how Matta'ns relate to animals or plants, their day-to-day existence does show considerable attention to the larger ecosystem around them, and an understanding of and empathy for its own, natural ways. However, this understanding and empathy do not affect Mattan's decision-making: they still make ecological decisions in a resources-needed vs. resources-for-the-future manner.

And with regard to plants and animals, they do not decide at all - they do not even consider plants and animals. The non-human living are mere commodities, and whether they think, how they feel or what they might want are ideas not hinted at or suggested. As considerate and generous as Matta'ns are about providing a good life for all humans, is as ignorant, unthinking, selfish and stingy as they are towards plants and animals.

SALLY MILLER GEARHART, THE WANDERGROUND: STORIES OF THE HILL WOMEN, 1979

Summary

When the new witch hunts begin and an independent woman is likely to disappear and never be seen again, it's time for many women to leave the city for hills and create the Wanderground. Between the city and the wanderground are the dangerlands but, since the earth has revolted, machines, guns, and men's erections do not work outside of the city itself. Once through the dangerlands, which men venture out into mostly for "cunt hunts," the women who have sought refuge in the country create their own separate civilization. There they discover psychic abilities which help them as they establish a new life -living in the forests, fields and meadows.

The Wanderground is a series of vignettes, small stories of various of the hill women and events in their daily lives. These stories focus on this event or that, some happening that occurs and is important in the lives of Seja, Clana, Voki, Artilidea, Pelagine, Fora, Manaje, Li, Ono, Blase, Egathese, Krueva, Ijeme, Evona, Chthona, Tulu and others. The stories overall show the common values by which the women have built the wanderground, their traditions, and the variety of opinion and perspectives that still exist with regard to many areas of their lives.

Underlying the stories is a theme of increased danger to the women

who have remained in the cities, and the possible threat that machines, guns and men's erections may begin to work again outside of the city. Wanderground women take shifts living in the city for a year, to try subtly to protect the women there and minimize the cultural shift against women, animals and the earth, and to keep themselves informed. This they do with the help of the gentles, non-violent men, who are allowed much more power than women. The theme of increased danger winds together with that of the wanderground women's cooperation with the gentles, and the women's misgivings about the actions of some gentles living in the country outside the wanderground.

Analysis

At the end of the Wanderground, the women who live there state their task: "To work as if the earth, the mother, can be saved/To work as if our healing care were not too late/Work to stay the slayer's hand/Helping him to change/Or helping him to die./Work as if the earth, the mother, can be saved." As a near-climax to the book, this seems a little ironic: although sometimes saccharin, the Wanderground, one of the earliest of these books written, has for 195 pages at that point done one of the best jobs of presenting the earth and her components as being subjects choosing their own actions according to their own intentions, and not a being whom humans might save.

Since the women's desire to save the earth is set against the

backdrop of a society whose orientation to nature the hill women summarize as "If it moves: shoot it down/If it grows: cut it/If it is wild: tame it, claim it/If it flows: a harness/If it shines or burns: gouge it out," it may well be that the earth cannot sustain herself against the numbers and constancy of assaults she receives, and may need help even while experiencing subjecthood.

Despite this small possible inconsistency, it is very nice to be able to compare degrees of agency shown in plants, animals and the earth, rather than having to search through the book for such agency. It is my pleasure to show the range of agency that natural beings evidence in Wanderground, rather than breaking down my discussion into the separate plant/animal/earth discussions with which I analyze other books. The manner in which the Wanderground is written allows me to rely heavily on quoting excerpts which tend to explain themselves, although not the contexts in which they occur.

In the spirit of saving the best for last -- read, the most agency -- I start off by showing the one time in which the hill women treat non-humans at about the same level we would treat a small child. Although in this excerpt the crows do have agency, they are mostly agreeing with what the women are deciding about them, exhibiting a low level of agency:

Behind her [Evona] heard Falstaff and Feste flapping their wings. She caught Chthona's shortstretch to them: "It's all right to stay out here. But we may be inside a long time." She could feel the crows'

approval of that plan. Nothing in them wanted to enter the dark building. "But none of your conversations," Chthona was warning. "We need quiet." "It's a good thing all the rest didn't come," Evona thought, remembering how Chthona's whole loud menagerie, particularly the raccoons, had insisted on joining them. In the end the prospect of windriding had discouraged most of the animals and Chthona had been able to convince the rest that there'd be more adventure right where they were.

Occasionally, a non-human merely responds to a human (rather than engaging in a conversation), which seems to leave the non-humans with a little less agency than the humans. Then again, maybe the non-humans in these examples don't choose to spend time and energy except to make a brief comment.

[Ono] stepped to [the trap] and with effort picked it up. It was attached by a chain to the root of a tree. Ono forced open the metal snap and pulled the trap free. The tree sang out a strong "Thank you!" It had not liked its role in the drama.

Large oaks and maples were the [deserted] town's most prominent feature. They welcomed the hill women, alone as they had been for so long.

The following excerpts may fall under the adage "actions speak louder than words" - although the humans here are saying words rather than taking actions, they reveal respectful intentions and

actions towards non-humans. Humans are still the subjects here, describing their own interpretations of and decisions about how much agency non-humans have. Fortunately, those interpretations and decisions recognize quite a bit of non-human agency:

[Clana] talked with [the small rodents] as they understood talk....she told them that she would never without their full consent take life from any one of them, that she knew them to be as much of her flesh as was her own body, that she yielded to their need of her even to her own dying if their touch with the mother required that.

“Tuna,” she smiled to herself, “I doubt that Micksblood’s ever seen a real fish. But he ought to love you instinctively. May you have loved living as Micksblood loves eating. May your going have been when you were ready and at your will.

Many of the human-non-human interactions in the Wanderground fall under the heading “Humans asking non-humans for something.” Since the non-humans are the ones deciding, they not only show agency but show that they are on even terms with the hill women. Since in all but two cases the non-humans assent to what the humans want, and in only one case gets anything in return, they appear usually to be granting the women favors out of the goodness of their hearts [sic]. This remains a bit suspect:

[Alaka] sent to Cassandra, “Coming?” The hound looked with a question to Ursula. Ursula, taking up her watch position, nodded and waved. Cassandra looked to Alaka who spread her arms in a shrug.

Cassandra rubbed with her nose...Alaka's trousers and then bounded back to share Ursula's watch.

"Earthsister," she said aloud to the water, "I want to join with you." The word seemed to come from all around her. "Join." A simple response. Alaka knew better than to stand in converse with so fundamental a substance. Such elements were to be moved with or felt into but never accosted or confronted.

...she shortstretched to the companions—who swam with her. A whole school responded as if one fish. "You are in trouble?" "Yes," she sent back. "I need air and light." "Not far away," assured the fish. "A few more of your strokes." Alaka almost exploded the remainder of her air in relief...."Thank you, waterones. May you go well and come again." "And again. And again. And again," sang the fish.

Cassandra [the hound] whimpered but declined to paint for [the woman] Ono. Even with washed wounds and with warm care, pain was still her overwhelming reality.

...in mutual mind effort from across the room they enfolded the tea water, requesting it to boil, aiding it, with its consent, in doing so.

To her right and toward the west just in her line of vision was a clump of scrub brush. She did not know its name but she felt she wanted it for a marker. She...ask[ed] for recognition, for participation in the coming openness. The bush awakened and

uncovered itself to her...."Be with me," she sent. "Be with me," the bush answered. The bush acknowledged and held at nodding distance.

To her left there was no land guide...Would the body of that cirrus cloud do [as a marker]? She stretched to it, covering its edges with a soft petition...Nothing came, [then]...unexpectedly it answered. She had not expected such a message. She had to listen with her unintentional ear, give to the cloud only secondary or peripheral attention....The wind was not pushy and the cloud intended to be there a good while. It was glad to be a marker.

"Oh fern," [Clana] said. "will you pretend to live on tiredness? And I will live on being excited?" The fern immediately agreed...As [Clana] trudged, she inhaled the rich energy that was the fern's exhalation and gave back to the plant with each of her own out-breathings her tiredness; that tiredness was the stuff of the fern's life. She could actually see the plant soaking up her fatigue, quenching her thirst. "It works!" she thought.

When non-humans voluntarily offer to help the human women, they show more independence than when they respond to human requests, exhibiting a slightly more agency:

"I will warm you" she heard. Laughing, she turned to the tree. Gently she laid herself against the heavy bark, spreading her legs and arms about the big trunk. "I take what you give," said the tree.

"I know," she said. "And I take what you give." She inhaled slowly...as she released her breath, the trunk pushed against her. Slowly...[her] trousers became dry and warm. So did even her soft shirt... Her hair swung free now and dry.

She was just about to extend to Egathese when another voice touched the edge of her mind. "Leaves," it said. "Leaves!" Without breaking her posture she gathered and sorted about her neat stacks of the long spatulate leaves...Only the middle leaves could be used. "Thank you," she sent to the tall tree behind her. "I was forgetting." "Again if you need me," the tree replied.

Most independent of all are the many times in the book when a plant, animal, the earth or rock takes action of its own, regardless of human sentiment: -

As she began to turn into [the depths of the underground passage], Fora [said] "I would have to see the sky." "So would I, so would I!" All of the women caught this grim echo from Lady[, the sparrow.] "You don't have to come with me," Fora sent. "I'll take you back to the broad sky." "If you keep me with you I want to stay. It's why I came, after all." "I will keep you with me," assured Fora. [Later Lady] gave her wings a tiny flex and tried to soothe her claustrophobia. "Caution," she thought to herself. "You cant' even get aloft in this dungeon." She was cold. Even despite the glow of the lobes she felt darkness and tightness crowding in upon her. "How can they stay here?" she mused. "Their skins will get pale

like white worms for lack of light. Their eyes will grow useless, their lungs will cave in." "There seems no warmth in these rocks," [Lady sent.] "Just tell me, Fora, why in the name of all who have lived do you want your implantment here? It would freeze the most fertile of wombs."

"I'm ready to go," sent the pony...."I am ready. I've done all that was important for me to do. And I don't want to wear out my welcome....I cannot move or say more. I ask that you hold me for awhile." It stretched its neck, fell back a bit on Krueva's arm then sent with calmer tones, "I commend my body to my sister, the cat. May she feed well."

Athena [a city cat] is off her feed. She may decide to die.

[In the Revolt of Earth, the Revolt of the Mother]...The earth finally said, 'no.' There was no storm, no earthquake, no tidal wave or volcanic eruption, no specific moment to mark its happening. It only became apparent that it had happened, and it had happened everywhere.

[Voki] sent the cries into the cleft itself, into the lining of the stone faces, into the interstices where in some restless shift of the earth ten thousand years ago they came together first. Voki felt the rocks moving. They parted ever so little yet so vastly to receive her pain; with sudden vulnerability they gave way before her face, separating to receive her cries, to enfold and welcome the vulnerability she brought to them...Her arms outstretched, she stroked the stones in

thanks...She was aware of...the rock cheeks that cradled her own.

The idea of bargaining connotes two or more entities who, being on even terms, need or hope to come to some mutually pleasing outcome. Humans and non-humans bargaining in the following three passages seem to shift roles as to who has the upper hand:

[Krueva] was brought up short by a hunger so intense that she physically shook. The cat was ravenous, and clearly come in search of the pony's flesh...."We are the forest women, the women from the hills," Ursula [called.] "We have dealt you no harm and have pledged our lives to your protection save when you turn on us. Do you know us?" "Know you well," sent the cat...."We parley with you for the [injured] pony....The animal still lives...We ask that you retire without its carcass. - Our terms are these...We will talk with the pony and see to its wounds as best we can. If it is deemed good by the pony itself and by us that it return to the mother, then we will help it to go and leave the body so that in the round of life you may gain sustenance from it...You would eat well of the warm flesh."

"Troja...is about to sing the Kore story," Blase sent [to Huntsblood, a cat]..."You said you wanted to hear a singing next time." "May I sing?" sent Huntsblood. "Not out loud. We are too near the edge of the Dangerland." "Then I'd rather wait for this field creature." "As you wish." Blase was about to search north...when Huntsblood came again. "No one would think a cat voice strange. Let me sing, Blase." There was a calculated pause before Huntsblood added, "I'll monitor

your dreams for a full night.” Blase hesitated. That was a tempting bargain. The cats rarely offered to dreamwatch....Blase laughed aloud. “All right, fascinating feline.”

She stopped [trying to return to her dream.] Very slowly she opened one eye. There were two eyes calmly staring at her....“Isn’t it time for your bath?” sent the cat. “Will you bathe with me?” Clana stretched back....“I have no need to cleanse myself that way [the remember cat replied]...Besides...I can’t stand the smell of that water.” “Then will you let me carry you to the resting rooms?” The cat considered. “Yes. That would be nice.”

Of course, if you can offend another being and have it get huffy and go off on its own, that too indicates both agency and independence:

“Do you enjoy remembering?” [Clana asked.] To her surprise the cat responded, “Do you enjoy breathing?” Clana withdrew, tiptoeing...back. She had overstepped. Everybody knew that remembering was in fact what a cat was, except for hunting, of course, and grooming and eating, all of which a cat was...Clana surrounded the calico with an apology...There was a brief acknowledgement before the cat closed off once more.

And, on a more mellow note, perhaps the most telling of all, in terms of equality, is when humans and non-humans are just hanging out together as ordinary folks:

[Diana] waited there a very long while as fireflies might reckon time; by the calculation of the trees only a few moments. She was gossiping with Brownsblood back at the ensconcement, the stealthy, patient cat of the children's bath, when her monitor stirred.

"We're ready now. We are Huntsblood and Blase." "And a ponderosa pine." The voices seemed to come from everywhere. Huntsblood inspected the canopy of green branches over his head. Blase...soothed with her hands the plates of pocked yellow armor that clothed the slender trunk. "And a ponderosa pine," she repeated. The three opened themselves to the pulses moving from the north....Blase and the cat and the ponderosa pine listened without moving....Now the pine tree joined in the singing. Far away from the voices she rustled her needles and swayed her passengers under the downpour of sounds. Huntsblood was in ecstasy. His head was erect, his eyes closed, his voice an amazing soft obligato...The chorus filled the air....

And a chorus it is indeed, what happens in the Wanderground. Although women and girl-children are the main characters, there are many non-human characters - and they lead lives of their own, sometimes intertwining with the women's, sometimes not. Regardless, they are full selves, from the omni-present cats to the trees and bushes, right down to the rocks and the all-encompassing earth herself.

KATHERINE FORREST, DAUGHTERS OF A CORAL DAWN, 1984

Summary

Daughters of a Coral Dawn is the story of a group of exceptionally long-lived women, descendents of an alien woman ("Mother") smuggled onto earth decades earlier, who illegally escape earth to colonize another planet. The novel follows their realization that earth is becoming increasingly controlling and limiting of women's lives, the decision of 4,000 of them to flee earth and settle elsewhere, their choice of planet, arrangements for transportation there, and the decisions they make once they arrive at their chosen destination and find it habitable, albeit coral-colored.

The women choose a continent on which to settle, build homes, and begin to anchor and shape their community. In the middle of this, they receive an emergency distress call from a spaceship which turns out to contain a 3-man, 1-woman crew. The remainder of the story follows the differences between the men's and the woman's (Laurel's) reaction to the colony, Laurel's eventual choice to stay on the planet when the men leave, and her own settling-in there.

Analysis

Much of Coral's storyline focuses on interpersonal human developments so that, as with many of the other novels described, the relationships between people and the plants, animals and land

around them receive secondary, background consideration. Although the women argue among themselves significantly before deciding to leave and during their plans to leave, they become almost enraptured of Mother and her chosen leader, Megan, once in space. Minerva, the historian/narrator, describes many events as merely occurring, without describing how or why they occur; we readers see and hear little to no argument. However, as in Woman on the Edge of Time, some amount of dissent exists among the settlers, at least with regard to animals.

My personal disappointment with the story remains the thin imagination the author applies to the animals of the new planet. Not only has Maternas experienced an evolution nearly identical to earth's, but most, if not all, of the animals the women encounter are direct parallels of earth animals. The settlers interact directly with animals only three times, and the animals in those events fall stereotypically into good-guy, bad-guy categories:

The first animal they meet is a lake-large amphibian, a la the Loch Ness monster, which frightens them considerably. It rears out of the water at one of their exploratory shuttlecraft which then inexplicably begins to drift towards the amphibian. As other shuttlecraft arrive, one of the team members realizes that the creature has hypnotized the first pilot. Following Megan's orders, the other pilots fly directly at the creature's face, firing lasers as they go - neither commanded nor countermanded by Megan but apparently of their own volition. Together they break the

amphibian's concentration and its hypnotic effect on the first pilot, who flies away safely.

During and after the hypnotizing, Kendra, the command pilot, repeatedly urges the others to let her kill the creature. It is first Megan's and then Mother's refusals that stop her from doing so. Megan explains that "there wouldn't have been enough time to mortally wound it." However, Mother, whose desires all the other women leap to fulfill, comments decisively, "we did not come to this new world to kill." Handily, the G.E.M. (Green-Eyed Monster) proves to probably be the last of its kind, and does not pose a species-wide threat to the women so long as they avoid it and its lake. The settlers appear gracious in allowing it to live, and do not have to argue about it since there is only one G.E.M.

Despite Mother's generous sentiment, the author's diction while describing the G.E.M. makes it clear to readers how they should feel: "The apparition... stirs the hair on the back of the neck as it calls forth memory of a primordial past. The creature of nightmare rises at least fifty feet above the surface of the lake in full serpentine horror, its undulating body layered in slimy armor, the immensely high column of neck topped by a scaly head composed almost entirely of bulbous viridian eyes and row upon row of huge serrated teeth." Their first close-up of an animal on Maternas casts it as truly "other," and therefore bad-guy. By comparison, the next creature they meet is a mammal, very much less "other," and gets to be a good-guy.

Maternas-animal-two is a "tiny furry creature" who runs directly towards the first group of women to land on the planet, leaps onto Mother's arm and clings there. He (for it proves to be male) is "dear, curious, cute, soft, dark, adorable, primate" and "closely resembling *Cebus Capucinus*," or a capuchin monkey. Mother immediately cooes and cooes over him and names him a "whoofie." Both his behavior and the women's strike me as unwarrantedly trusting: he continues to be held by Mother; Mother decides to take him back to the main spaceship. The women decide that he is harmless because "a tiny thing like that would never attack anything larger" and "he's much too cute to bite."

Without mentioning any possible effects on the whoofie, the settlers decide that, as long as he goes through decontamination, he is welcome aboard the ship. One biologist explains the whoofie's trust as the result of the continent having no carnivores besides G.E.M., and therefore he has nothing to fear from large land animals. This still does not explain his positive rather than neutral reaction to the landing party. With one exception, the whoofie maintains the role of an adoring pet appearing in Mother's company throughout the remainder of the book.

I wish to note that exception, because it is the one occasion on which the good-guy animal evidences agency. The women's first on-planet exploration begins late afternoon. As they walk to the shore of their first site, afternoon turns to evening and a sudden wind

rises. The whoofie jumps out of Mother's arms and runs towards a meadow of thigh-high grass, apparently with little concern despite the strong wind that knocks him down a few times. The women's instinct is to run towards their ships to take cover. Megan orders that they follow the little guy instead. Once there, they discover that the grass has sprung erect to shoulder-height during the winds (which prove to be brief but violent each evening) and provides perfect shelter for the region's animals. It is the one time the settlers gain information by paying attention to how the planet's own inhabitants behave.

These two incidents, with the G.E.M. and the whoofie, are the main ones in which the settlers deal with animals directly. They also briefly meet some area reptiles after they have been settled a short time. These large lizards corner one of the women against a tree while she is collecting mushrooms: "three small but armored and razor-toothed Crocodylia....had crawled up from the depths of the river to ravage the fungi, and now meant to make a snack of little Vesta."

Vesta's partner Carina beats the lizards with a branch until they have backed off enough to let Vesta free. Again, there is some dissent among the women, for Carina continues to beat the lizards once Vesta is free, while Vesta yells at her not to. The scene closes with "Carina pursuing creatures which scuttled about in panic, dodging her blows and seeking only to return to the peace of their river bottom." Reptiles prove to be as "other" as amphibians; both are conquered, while the mammal, conveniently small, remains a

friend/pet. Although Megan later tells the male visitors "Killing for food is not necessary and not allowed," Vesta later tells Laurel, "My Carina is captain of a hydroflit... She fishes the ocean with her crew." And so, fish too are "other," and fishing does not constitute killing.

If there are few dealings with animals in Coral, there are even fewer with plants. The aforementioned grass provides shelter in the wind at a critical moment; a thick moss covers the sandy dunes and beach area. The women pull grass from the soil in order to test it, and pull up a chunk of moss. After discovering the strong nocturnal winds, one of the biologists concludes, "... it is simple now to understand the toughness and deep root system of this grass, the moss that covers the land down to the shoreline. It protects the land from what would be disastrous soil erosion, it protects insect and animal life."

Since there is no point at which plants show agency, I interpret "it protects the land...insect and animal life" to mean that the grass and moss have evolutionarily evolved to that niche, rather than that they actively seek to protect other life. The settlers do go on to cultivate the valley they settle in, use the native grass for clothing, pick supple, leafy twigs to weave into wreaths for awards, and decorate festive occasions with "banks of flowers."

The women do find a plant adversary, in that a disease which wipes out a portion of their population turns out to be spore-borne. The

disease is described as “the parasitic spores that stalk us” and “our predator.” They do not consider the disease’s role in its home world. As with animals, it is the bad-guy plants that get some small amount of agency, which the women can then fight and overcome.

In contrast to their relationships with animals and plants, the women are far more considerate and respectful of the planet and its ecosystems. Initially, in choosing how to establish a community, Megan proclaims “We are not traditional colonists. Indeed, with our superior awareness we have the most-profound philosophical obligations as we choose among seven biomes with evolutionary processes very different from each other....our obligation to the future compels us not to interfere in the ecological balance and evolutionary process of our world. On this basis, the decision has been taken that no terraforming shall occur on Maternas.” Because she uses passive voice, we do not know who decides this - Megan, or the colony as a whole. And, Megan does not specify whose future she means when she says “the future” - is it the colonists future, the planet’s, or both? Regardless, the women do work mostly with the planet rather than against it.

In choosing the specific site at which to settle, Megan focuses on the “climatic and topographic regions most naturally friendly to us,” which turns out to be the continent ‘Femina.’ She goes on to describe a million square miles of it as an area where “Dominance is still being resolved....We will not -- must not -- intrude where we would interfere with such highly specific life-forms. Which brings

us to the southwest area of Femina....In this area...the mountain range presents a formidable barrier to the many large life forms in other sectors, and will protect us from them and them from us.”

Even with such fine words, Megan goes on to say, “But while we must be concerned with our effects on the varied life on our land, we need have no such concerns about the sea....evolutionary paths are well established in all the waters of our planet. Sea life is so bountiful that to impact negatively upon it is impossible.” The women show either short-term memory loss re: the desertification of earth oceans, or show that they deem fish and other sea life inferior to land life. This fits well with the “dinosaurs and crocodiles are icky, monkeys are cute” sentiment that summarizes their dealings with the planet’s animals.

An argument ensues: “Meat eating is barbaric.” “Not if it’s necessary.” Mother quashes the discussion by saying, “Argue later, dears.” Nonetheless, they do choose to settle in an ecosystem where they will have reduced contact with the planet’s animals. A Megan devotee comments on Megan’s choice of site and her community design by saying, “her plan will allow us to be ecologically one with our world.”

In a number of ways, the settlers’ actions match their declarations. They view the strong night winds, the afternoon downpours and recurring earthquakes as the spirit of the planet. They do not grumble about these conditions or seek to tame them, but instead

act in ways that accept them. The women carve their homes out of the hills and outcroppings at the edge of the valley in which they choose to settle, and then use carved material to feed their "synthesizers." In addition, they not only do not begrudge the dangerous winds, but carve their new homes in such a way as to make each a flute, so that the buildings catch the wind at night and turn it into song. When they discover the unpredictability of the rain and that it is warm, they simply continue to move around and work during periods of rain, saying "we have assimilated the rain into our lives."

However, they also do not live entirely as one with the planet: "The previous denizens of Cybele, a reptilian population and a vast number of marsupials -- a most comical cross between kangaroo and primate -- have been carefully encouraged by various non-lethal means to relocate outside our borders." Once Vesta and Carina have met the Crocodylia, Megan orders the women to wear "the device designed by her...emitting a non-fatal current of adjustable strength which will repulse small creatures and seriously discourage larger ones." Despite separating themselves in this fashion from their surroundings, the women kill only fish, grasses, twigs and flowers, and do not (knowingly) harm other life.

The settlers' consideration of the planet becomes highlighted once the men arrive. As soon as they land, the men's commander orders "For security, I want all this grass around us burned off. Hanigan, burn it." No sooner does Hanigan try to do so than a laser beam near-misses their ship, followed by the information, "The next burst

will strike you. Cease fire immediately. Grass cover is vital to the ecological survival of this area.” The women then insist that that the men disarm their personal weapons, to which the same commander protests, “We may need them for hunting, food-gathering.” The settlers’ remain firm, saying “Killing for food is not necessary and not allowed.” In the face of harm, the women protect and are ready to defend the planet on behalf of its welfare rather than on the basis of “owning” the land.

All in all, the Daughters mostly leave the planet and their surroundings alone. They speak of the planet itself in a loving manner, and in fact adjust themselves to it. They neither confine nor kill animals, and appear to remove only small portions of plants. While the amount of plant removal may change as their population grows, their basic underlying theme seems to be “let it be.”

Maternas’ settlers do not engage themselves with the land or its inhabitants. The women vaguely treat the planet as an entity to respect, but do not exactly accord it agency. The same is true for both the G.E.M. and the whoofie who saves them from the night winds - the women recognize the animals as having volition, but make their decisions based on what they want without taking the animals seriously, let alone considering them as equals. Although the women do not seek community with the plants, animals and land around them, and do not particularly acknowledge or honor them, they also do not harm anyone or anything very much.

URSULA K. LEGUIN, ALWAYS COMING HOME, 1985

Summary

Always Coming Home is a book that contains a novella, a number of unconnected short stories, poems, essays, and songs, and a single chapter of a novel. Le Guin, having been raised in an anthropological household, uses these various forms of writing to create a fairly anthropological expose of the Kesh, a people who "might be going to have lived a long, long time from now—in Northern California."

Together her pieces reveal the lives and culture of the Kesh who live scattered among nine villages along the river Na in "the Valley." Other peoples live around the Kesh, spread throughout this future Northern California. Only the Condor play a major role.

Because they are the longest and most coherent pieces, I focus on the autobiographical novella by Stone Telling and a chapter of the novel Dangerous People, and some explanatory tidbits: the Serpentine Codex and Chart of the Nine Houses, How To Die in the Valley, Some of the Other People of the Valley, and What They Ate.

Stone Telling's story is that of growing up in the village Sinshan where she is one of the few people in the area who is Hwikmas, "half-house;" that is to say, she belongs to her mother's house (clan), but since her father came from the Condor, a people far away, she does not have a father's house to refer to and draw upon, nor a father's family to lend shape to her own historical context.

The story is that of her growing up, her father's reappearance in Sinshan when North Owl (Stone Telling's childhood name) is nine, her brief introduction to his Condor way of life, and her father's subsequent need to leave Sinshan once again. North Owl decides to follow her father to his people when she is 15 and describes the seven years she lives among the Condor, and then the years when she returns to Sinshan and re-settles into the life of her own people. The bulk of my conclusions are drawn from Stone Telling's story, the longest piece in the book.

The chapter from Dangerous People is just that - one chapter only, but one which provides a second perspective of day-to-day Kesh life. It follows the attempts of a village's weaver to find out where his wife has disappeared to, his young son's illness, the musings of the village doctor who is observing the weaver and caring for his sick son, and the weaver's interactions with a traveling troupe of performers who are visiting the village.

The Serpentine Codex is not a story but an annotated chart of the social structure of the Kesh people, a word Kesh use to include all humans, animals and plants. It describes the living/spiritual (the two cannot really be separated to the Kesh) relations among those people. The Chart of the Nine Houses illustrates what the Serpentine Codex describes.

How to Die in the Valley, Some of the Other People of the Valley, and What They Ate describe exactly those things; “Other People” are, here, domestic and game animals, with some mention of their wild kin.

Analysis

How the Kesh relate to the larger world around them is neatly distilled in these excerpts from a four-day journey North Owl takes alone up a mountain when she is eight: – “The name of the meadow was Gahheya, for the big blue serpentine heyiya [sacred, or holy] rock in the northwest part of it. As I left I went past that rock Gahheya. I was going to stop and speak to it, but it was speaking to me; it said, ‘Don’t stop, go on, go high, before the sun.’ So I went on up across the high hills...”

“Everything that came to me I spoke to by name or by saying heya [“praise,” or recognition of being sacred], the trees, fir and digger pine and buckeye and redwood and manzanita and madrone and oak, the birds, blue jay and bushtit and woodpecker and phoebe and hawk, the leaves of chamise and scrub oak and poison oak and flowering thorn, the grasses, a deer’s skull, a rabbit’s droppings, the wind blowing from the sea.”

“Once the coyote came [to my eyes]....The coyote I called Singer. I had seen the coyote skulking at lambing time...but I had not seen her in her House. I liked the look of her, lean and neat, the color of wild

oats in winter, with light eyes. I said, 'Singer! I will go your way!'...I could not see her go, so I could not go her way. But that night she and her family sang coyote wakwa [ceremony/festival/dance] near me half the night....So Coyote let me come into her House."

"I put my hand into the water [of the pool] and asked it for direction. I felt power in it, and it frightened me. It was dark and still. It was not the water I knew, not the water I wanted...I...looked for a sign or a word, trying to understand. On the water something came towards me: the waterskater...I said, 'I give you what blessing I can, Silent One, give me what blessing you can!' The insect stayed still awhile there between air and water, where they meet, its place of being, and then it slid away into the shadow of the banks of the pool. That was all there."

"I washed in the creek, and came back up the meadow in the twilight. Gahheya Rock was there, and I went to it. It said, 'Now touch me.' So I did, and so came home. I knew something had come to me that I did not understand, and maybe did not want, from...the pool and the waterskater...[but] so long as my hand and the rock touched each other I knew that I had not gone wrong, even if I had come to nothing."

This is the Kesh way - to continuously pay attention to and say heya to many beings and places, especially those which are not ordinary or encountered daily. Their doing so -- their talking about and

making vocal their recognition of oaks, deer, springs, manzanita clearings, squirrels, birds, weather, rocks, etc. as their own entities-- keeps them constantly living among and with the land around them.

The Kesh, as farmers and gatherers, and even occasionally, hunters, spend almost all of their time outdoors. (North Owl says, when she is living with the Condor "I was ill because I was living indoors all the time, outside the world.") Each Kesh village's layout consists of two C-shaped arcs with spiral tips that join at "the hinge;" one arc is the planting side, and the other, the hunting side. The nine villages in the valley North Owl lives in are all small, and their fields are also small. Never is any human person far from wilderness, which separates all the villages.

Most Kesh activities recognize the land they live in (they would probably say "with"). When the Condor army passes through and wants to build a large bridge for their supplies, "...most of the Valley people who had given thought to the matter had decided that it was a mistake to put a bridge across the River without consulting either the River or the people who lived alongside it" and that "If a bridge at this place were appropriate, there would be one."

Ultimately, so as to reach a compromise and end the argument, the Kesh stop their blockade and move aside once the Condor agree to build a temporary bridge, and dismantle it when they leave.

And, although a Kesh conversation may be about other human people,

or a piece of history, the land and its inhabitants will also always play a part in it. They are so mixed in with the daily life of the Kesh that there is no way to leave them out of anything. For this reason, I love the Valley. There is no way for the Kesh to ignore, or forget, where and with whom they live: "The Kesh sense of community, of continuity with the dirt, water, air and living creatures of the Valley determines them to overcome any ordeals in order to get home to die; the idea of dying and being buried in foreign lands is black despair."

And yet, even after several readings, I remain sad about the Kesh's relationships with animals. All this continuous recognition, and the Kesh still raise, kill, and hunt all sorts of animals! My problem is that I believe anyone in Sinshan would have a much greater knowledge and appreciation of, and pay more real attention to, both domestic and wild animals than even your average liberal American...

And yet early in the book North Owl says, about herself when she was a very little girl, "I learned not to name them [the family's himpi, similar to guinea pigs], and not to trade them alive for eating, but to kill quickly those I traded, since some people kill animals without care or skill, causing fear and pain." But in the next sentence, she goes on to tell of her grief when a sheepdog gets into the himpi pens and kills them all, and follows that by saying "I could not speak to a dog for months after that" - again according an animal selfhood and agency!

The Kesh divide animals into three non-hierarchical groups: those of the First House of the Earth, or Obsidian clan, are domestic animals and birds; those of the Second House of the Earth, or Blue Clay clan, are game animals and birds; and those of the Four Houses of the Sky are “most birds, sea fish, shellfish, wild animals that are not hunted for food..., reptiles, amphibians, insects.” The latter group they let be. The first two live in close relation to humans, and, although probably living quite peaceful lives by our standards, not infrequently die at their hands.

The Kesh raise sheep, goats, cows, donkeys, a few horses and mules, dogs, cats, chickens, himpi, and bees. Many of these -- goats, cows, horses, donkeys, mules, dogs, and cats - are “commensals, named, and counted and regarded as members of the household.” LeGuin goes on to explain, “The word *commensal* [Webster’s reads “living in a state of relation between two kinds of organisms in which one obtains food or other benefits from the other without damaging or benefiting it”] has been used to avoid the condescending, patronizing overtones of the word *pet*, and because it better translates the Valley term, which means people living together. By the standards of the animal breeding and slaughtering industries of our society, all domesticated animals of the Valley were “pets,” but those standards are questionable in every sense. At any rate, children and many adults “lived together” with various beasts....”

Yes, they live together, but it seems to me the humans do benefit from each of the animals they live with, and that, with perhaps the exceptions of the dogs and cats who wander free and are not penned,

that the animals are born into captivity and have not chosen to live or work as they do.

Sheep and goats are raised for their wool, and “mutton and lamb were the festival meat of the Valley.” Goats and cows are raised for their milk, and eating beef is basically sneered at among the Kesh, although without an exact reason why. Cows and donkeys are raised for their labor in the fields: “...a great many different people worked in them, with animals rather than machine assistants, or as assistants to animals rather than machines...” Donkeys “worked with people at hauling, carrying, pulling, plowing and all donkeywork.” Horses are raised for racing. Dogs are raised to defend villages from wild dogs. Cats are most clearly presented as something like pets, but even they do their task of keeping “the house, the granary, and the field” clear of rodents.

LeGuin describes sheep as “regarded with a kind of affectionate awe, as an intrinsically mysterious being,” cows as “mild, canny, and goodnatured, deserving the praise they got,” dogs as “beloved commensals,” and young North Owl spends much of her time in the company of Sidi, the cat who lives in their household. Stone Telling repeatedly uses the word “people” throughout her story to include animals in the events and musings she describes - and yet if a human person wants to eat meat, or a domestic population gets too big, the human kills an animal, not a human. All “people” are not equal in the Valley.

“Domestic animals killed for food were addressed before or during the act of killing by...any adult or adolescent woman. She said to the animal, ‘Your life ends now, your death begins. Beautiful one, give us our need. We give you our words.’ The formula was gabbled without the least feeling or understanding, often, but it was never omitted, even by a housewife wringing the neck of a chicken.” Words in exchange for my life? What kind of a trade is that?

And in the woods, meadows or waters? LeGuin does point out that hunting is mainly a children’s sport, and emphasizes that the Kesh attach shame to any adult who hunts more than infrequently, since meat “was of very little real importance to their food supply” and “hunting, in general, was not seen as appropriate behavior for an adult.” She goes on to say “If a hunter...did not clean and skin his catch properly, distribute the meat, hide, etc., appropriately, and dispose of the waste, he would be lectured at or ridiculed as an incompetent. If a hunter killed excessively, or without a pretty good excuse of wanting food, hide, or furs, he would be in danger of getting a reputation as psychotic, a ‘crazy’ man.”

But they do hunt, with guns for bear, wild dog, and pig, which were all killed when they became dangerous to people, and “bow and arrow, snare, and slingshot...[in] ‘the art of silence’” for deer, rabbit, squirrel, possum, quail and pheasant. The animals are “those who allowed themselves to be hunted, who responded to the hunter’s singing and came to meet the arrow or enter the snare, had consented to come across into the Second of the Earth Houses [the

clan of game animals and birds, as opposed to the four houses, or clans, of the sky - wilderness animals]... in order to die. They had taken on mortality sacrificially and sacramentally.”

At least in this description, the animal theoretically has chosen its death, unlike any mention of choice ascribed to domestic animals. Do I believe it? Not when I see no humans approaching another human, seeking their own deaths. Since the Kesh culture is already significantly different in its values than the culture I am a part of, perhaps a Kesh person could give me an explanation that I would believe, as to why an animal would want to rush to its death for a human.

I do know that the Kesh prize giving, and that North Owl, when she becomes Woman Coming Home, considers herself poor because she has so little to give. Perhaps there is a logic bridge that would say an animal is rich if it gives its life - but, as portrayed, there are no Kesh humans doing the same; humans give materials, and products, and knowledge, but not by giving up their lives.

“Wild animals hunted had each their song...The hunter sang or talked to the animal he was hunting, silently while the hunt was on, aloud at or after the kill...there were hundreds of them.” Two examples of hunting songs for deer go “This way you must come, delicately walking. I name you Giver” and “Deerness [different from an individual deer] manifests a death. My word is grateful.”

North Owl speaks of her father saying “only the most careless hunters would let him come, because he did not sing to the deer or speak to the death.” So the Kesh do see care in their hunting, a way to do it right - and a way to do it wrong: “Ghost stories of a moralistic nature involve hunters who hunted on the ‘planting side,’ or who failed in courtesy or respect towards the animal they hunted...,” the worst offense of which was unheard of - to “not speak to the death” by saying [at the least] “Beautiful one, for your death my words!”

LeGuin goes on to say “Even when a corn-borer was squashed, a mosquito swatted, a branch broken, a flower picked, the formula was muttered in its ultimately reduced form: *arrariv*, ‘my word[s].’” I feel exhausted from all this discussion - I see at as an improvement that these people offer time and voice to acknowledge that they are killing...but still, they are killing another being.

And there my sorrow continues to lie. I do appreciate all the heyas, the time and attention that the Kesh give animals... and I would rather be a Kesh animal than one in our world, with its inconsideration and cruelty. But overall, I would rather be an animal somewhere else, where I could live wild and race around and keep my own days and face my predator with skills of my own. I love the Kesh for noticing - and remain cranky as well as sad, that they give so much credence to animals’ intelligence, independence and personhood overall, but still keep them apart from humans by killing them.

Lastly, LeGuin says "Most wild animals...however familiar, beloved, or pestiferous, did not share a House of Life with human beings. The relationship is based essentially on who eats whom. Those whom we do not eat, or who eat us, are not related to us in the same way as those whom we eat." No, they are not the same - but why not? Why does sharing equate to raising and hunting, butchering and killing? I haven't found a Kesh answer.

Plants in the Valley hold a far more singular and uneventful role than their animal or rock or river cousins. As with many of the other books, many of the plants that Kesh characters mention are foods: corn, beans, potatoes, squash, tomatoes, plums, apricots, grapes, olives, plums, nectarines, walnuts, almonds, mushrooms, etc. The planting plots or orchards may be either individual or communal, and rather higgledy-piggledy in their sites on the planting side of a village. This, at least, constrains plants less than we do, with our linear rows - maybe a tiny tad more like how a plant might be in the wild. But are they treated any different, any better? .

Most Sinshan folk were members of the Planting Lodge, and the book mentions humans working in fields, orchards and vineyards crops again and again - but whether anyone loved it, resented it, or couldn't have cared less about their plant-work, or the plants themselves, I don't know. In none of the sections I read closely did any character describe any feelings associated with planting, tending or harvesting any of these crops, so I can't say how the Kesh might have felt about them.

However, the Kesh do seem... affectionate? proud? loving? when they describe most locations by the plants found there, as well as by the landforms. North Owl and various other characters notice and relate in their stories the alder, azalea, bay laurel, buckeye, chamise, eucalyptus, fir, ginkgo, madrone, manzanita, oak, pine, poplar, redwood, saltgrass, scrub oak, sweetshrub, toyon, wild oats, wild rose, willow that live in the places they go, both within and outside of their villages. They describe time according to what is growing or blooming, about to grow or bloom, just died or just bloomed. This ties back into their constant awareness of -- and peace from, I think -- being a part of a larger community

Plants never get the voice or become characters in stories the way other beings do - instead, they play a supporting role. There may be a few exceptions. In Sinshan, a grove of oaks is named Gairga, and the naming has the feel of something more intimate than that of place, more akin to naming a child or a pet. In Dangerous People, a single oak is named as well, Gahega. But neither of the stories does more than name them. In only one place are plants described as people: “[My mother] did not want to be with people, neither human nor the sheep of our family nor even the old trees on Sinshan Ridge, the grey-leaved olives.” Even so, the olives never get to do anything - just be not visited, as objects.

And, few seem to be killed. A number of things are made out of wood, but most items are taken care of well, and last a long time.

Since populations are small compared to the land they live on, the wood houses, doors, beams and boxes mentioned are not likely to have required many trees cut from the forest. I expect the same philosophy of “use it thoroughly” that applies to animals would apply to using all parts of a tree as well. Neither any description of the land nor the illustrations of it show even a small piece of hill or valley denuded - there is no wholesale slaughter of trees and the ecosystems they anchor, as there is in our world.

Finally, I come back to my initial pleasure and gratitude that the Kesh know, understand, pay attention to, and take into consideration the world they live in. My only regret with them is that they hold animals in captivity (albeit a softer, gentler one than ours), and that they slaughter some of their domestic animals and hunt wild ones. I would rather live in a Kesh valley than in the lands of some of the other books in this study - as a human, animal or plant - but there are also books in whose lands I would prefer to live.

JUDY GRAHN, MUNDANE'S WORLD, 1988

Summary

Mundane's World provides the reader a series of looping vignettes, following a girl on the brink of womanhood, her mother and three aunts, four girls about her same age with whom she shares her time, two of her friends' mothers, an aunt and cousin of one of them, a lion, an oak tree, a scheming weed, an owl, a mama mouse, a grasshopper, and some doves. The plot weaves its way like a thin, rich ribbon through dozens of several-page-long chapters told from just about everyone's point of view. Most of what is told is about the daily lives, opinions and interactions of Mundanians, both human and non-human, during one hot early summer in Mundane.

The story itself takes place in and is named after the city of Mundane where a river cuts through a plain and spills into the sea. The city is made up of brick buildings, courtyards with gardens, social spaces on rooftops, ladders up and down, and fields with canals. Mundane's humans are divided among four clans: the Snake Clan, in charge of healing; the Bee Clan, in charge of building; the Lion Clan, in charge of animals; and the Tortoise Clan, in charge of farming.

The main characters and their clans are as follows:

The five girls-about-to-become-women, all friends:

Ernesta Snake Clan
Jessi-ma Bee Clan
Margedda Tortoise Clan
Fran-keen Lion Clan
Dee Tortoise Clan

Ernesta's family, all Snake clan:

Donna Ernesta's mother, a little vague with her siblings, found more often with non-humans than humans

Aunt One Ernesta's aunt, Donna's older sister, a formidable townswoman

Aunt Two Ernesta's aunt, Donna's older sister, a formidable townswoman

Aunt Three Ernesta's aunt, Donna's older sister, a formidable townswoman

Blueberry Jon Ernesta's uncle, Donna's brother, Gedda's sometimes lover

Mama Mundane Ernesta's grandmother, Donna, Blueberry Jon and the Aunts' mother

Jessi-ma's family, all Bee clan:

Sonia Jessi-ma's mother, one of the new temple architects

Lillian Jessi-ma's aunt, the main new temple architect (dead)

Jon Lilly Jessi-ma's toddler cousin, Lillian's son

Margedda's family; Gedda is Tortoise clan:

Gedda Margedda's mother, an outlander native to far north of Mundane

Edda Margedda's grandmother, Gedda's mother, visits Mundane for the girls' ceremony

The small but centrally important plot dips and rises out of these chapters: Lillian of the Bee clan has been found dead on some cliffs at the edge of the city; her measuring doves are missing. As a result, work has stopped on the construction of a new temple whose foundation has been laid near the river. The mid-summer festival will have to go on without the much-expected dedication of the new temple. In a women's rite of passage, the five girls uncover the real reason why Lillian died, and what bearing this has on the temple and Mundane life in general.

Analysis

If there were ever a society to follow the bumper sticker adage of "Honor Diversity," Mundanians would be close to pulling it off. As a result, trying to draw one single conclusion about how Mundanians treat other beings is a slippery proposition. Ernesta's three aunts and, in turn, their sister Donna illustrate this diversity of opinion:

“Aunt One says onions have such potential for stinging the eyes that she always cuts them holding them in a bowl under some water so they can’t get out to her and sting her.... Aunt Two says there is only one way to cut onions and that anyone knows this, and she herself knows it the best. She says the onions might sting some people’s eyes and this shouldn’t bother anyone least of all her.... Aunt Three says there is every way to cut an onion and it really doesn’t matter which one anyone uses. She says they do not sting a person and are the world’s most wondrous vegetable.”

“Ernesta said, ‘I am just waiting for something to happen.’

‘Nothing will happen,’ Aunt Two said.

‘Oh you never can tell,’ called Aunt One. ‘Everything always changes.’

‘Nothing ever changes,’ Aunt Two said...’And I’m glad for that. I love the peace of it all.’ -To Aunt Two change meant disorder and disorder meant evil and that took up a lot of time. Aunt Two does not like to give up her time.

‘Oh yes it does,’ Aunt One said....

‘No,’ Aunt Two said. ‘Nothing ever does change, everyone knows that.’

Aunt One held the wet wicker strands in her mouth as she climbed on her short stool over the wall of her basket. ‘Yef ik dudds,’ she said speaking through the wickers.

‘No,’ Aunt Two said, shaking her hands and going back into the house.

‘Yef,’ sang Aunt One from inside her handy work.”

“[Donna] is so connected to the plants, she says they are more

individual to her than animals or humans; she says sometimes they speak to her of their confinement. The three aunts believe it is... the nature of plants to love confinement; rootless mobility, they say, is what a plant hates most. Why else do trees shriek in the wind if not in terror of losing their roots?"

Not only do out-and-out disagreements contribute to the diversity of Mundane, but different people may look at the same situation and see different things. Blueberry Jon, Aunt Two, Margedda and Gedda view the following predicament from different points of view:

"The newest effort [from Jon's sack] rolled to the floor and became a little feathered person, a little comical feathery thing. 'I found this child owl,' Jon began to tell, however his sisters did not then let him finish his story....Snake clan [herbalist] people did not have interchange with owls as a way of respecting snakes. 'I won't allow one of them in my house,' Aunt Two declared making herself larger...'I don't want one of them under my roof. No indeed, never.'"

Blueberry Jon ends up giving the baby owl to his partner's daughter, Margedda, who keeps it in a small birdcage she carries with her and feeds it baby mice. This elicits a different, although equally vehement, reaction from Margedda's mother Gedda, Jon's partner: "[Margedda] had no respect for the fragility of stored foods...bringing home mice, mice to invade the fields and grain bins and display to the neighbors that Gedda was not a serious farming woman who

deserved a place in the clan and her own household... To counter the owl and the mice who she knows the Tortoise [farming] people do not like, Gedda has now brought home a cat of sorts, a wildish river reed cat.... Gedda says [that the cat's] presence is Margedda's responsibility because without the threat of escaping mice they would not need a cat at home in the first place. She refuses to discuss the matter further."

And sometimes it is the city of Mundane rather than individuals whose opinions are divided over something:

"[T]he Bee [construction] clan...people are irrepressible in their love of their own motion and fascination with everything that lies still and can be handled. They had also a great impatience toward material matters so that they could not let a mountain be a mountain or a tree a tree but must take them apart and put them together in some other form of their own measuring. Some people thought their tendencies to do this were entirely too frequent and unwarranted while others said that it was good, that Ana herself built and restructured things and that the Bee clan came from Ana."

Ernesta's young musings show how un-solid opinions and ideas are in Mundane: "Was cooking the same as ripening on a limb. Was burning in the fire the same as cooking. Was producing the same as mothering. Was receiving the same as worshipping. Was eating the same as valuing. Was looking the same as eating." To her, perhaps in part because she is on the cusp of adulthood, with its possible more fixed ideas, no one thing is true.

So how does a reader decide how Mundanian humans think and feel about non-humans? In this book there is a more variable answer than for the other novels, but the method for answering is the same: look at how they act towards non-humans.

Grahn throws in something of a red herring to this analysis. She recognizes a number of animals', plants' and the earth's views, and gives these non-humans page after page of voice in the novel. But even though the author has chosen to give so much voice to these non-humans, how she, the author, treats non-humans is not the same thing as how the Mundanians themselves treat non-humans.

And although there are whole chapters about mice's dealings with owls, and the oak tree's feelings about the ants, beetles and wasps which live with her, these are interactions among non-humans and do not reflect human/non-human sentiments. With that in mind, let's focus on the actions of Mundane citizens towards other beings.

In Mundane's world, animals far outnumber plants or earth-parts. I believe the variety of animals in Mundane's world outnumbers the animals in any of the other books: lions, goats, buzzards, donkeys, sheep, snakes, ants, beetles, owls, mice, flies, cats, doves, pigs, peahens, butterflies, cows, bears, ducks, guinea hens, moths, herring, snails, slugs, voles, frogs, caterpillars, hawks, weasels, grouse, crocodiles, and so forth. Animals show up on almost every page of the book. In fact, one of the city's four clans is the Lion clan

of animal handling.

The sad part is that many of the animals that appear in Mundane's world are domestic and at the receiving end of being handled. Donkeys live in stables and provide transportation for humans, quarried rocks or volcanic ash. Shepherds in the hills take care of family flocks of sheep and goats which in turn become stew and wool and sheepskins. Pigs get pickled into pork and inflated as emergency river floats, although Mama Mundane receives one as a gift who becomes her pet. Cows provide milk, butter and cheese. Doves live in dovecotes and are released as measuring tools. Domestic animals remain the objects of Mundanians.

Wild animals also appear in Mundane's world, with some fitting in an odd slot on the subject-object continuum:

"See that grasshopper? It's that grasshopper's big fat fate to be eaten by somebody. Otherwise it wouldn't taste so good to so many creatures....it's going to be snapped up by Gedda's cat unless we catch it for Margedda's owl]....'

'Haloo? Haloo? Grasshopper! We're trying to help you!'

'Liar,' Ernesta muttered, stumbling after.

'We are, we're helping it explore its fate,' her friend insisted...

[After they have caught the grasshopper and taken it to Margedda's house,] "...the longbodied insect took the opportunity to leap in a great arc... landing directly in front of a medium sized cat on the end of a leather leash... who reached with one paw and fastened the

grasshopper to the earth.

'Oh no,' Jessi-ma said... as the grasshopper shell began crunching under the reed cat's teeth.

'My Aunt Two calls this 'Fate of Decision,' Ernesta said. 'That grasshopper made up its mind that nobody was going to eat it except the reed cat, and so it was.'"

In this particular case, and in another which the author rather than Mundanians narrate, in which mice have created owls to prey on them so that they "can produce plenty- of hot little pink children knowing there will never be too many," the being which is getting eaten has chosen to be eaten. This seems a facile and questionable reasoning, rather like saying that African-American slaves "needed" to be confined and put to work or that incest or rape survivors "wanted it." Such reasoning shifts focus to the object of an action and avoids focus on the agent of an action, the subject.

While I think it a fitting part of an ecosystem for carnivore animals to hunt and eat their prey as the cat does the grasshopper and the owl does mice, Mundane's World does not discuss humans' role in raising, hunting and killing animals to eat or work for them. I wonder whether Mundanians would apply this same notion of "fate" to animals' objecthood in cases where humans are the subjects.

Other wild animals such as the orphaned baby owl and the river reed cat become pets. Outside of one fireplace scene, the cat is always on a leash where it constantly struggles and pulls; the owl lives in a

cage until its last scene, where it is sitting on furniture in a living room. Both live at the direction of humans around them.

Although not pets and not bound by human direction, some wild animals appear in Mundane's world only in danger from humans: dayfishers and nightfishers threaten fish the clock 'round; the Spider Society uses "night buckets, specially made with wire mesh across the tops, traps for the nocturnal creatures they used in their divination and potions;" and the baby mice in Mundane never know when Margedda will uncover, steal and feed them to the baby owl.

Many of the interactions with animals mentioned so far take place on the edges of the storyline, occurring in brief mentioned sentences. The main storyline does include some wild and independent animals. The book begins with a wild mama lion who meets, awes and does not hurt five girls. At a critical moment in the story a lion who is probably the same one tries to warn a woman away from a dangerous mistake she is making, but only scares the woman who cannot face her. At the end of the book the lion tells Ernesta, "I always look out for you and for all the grandchildren of my city," as has proved true by that point in the plot.

In their turn, buzzards are wise birds, the releasers of tension, who "[make] certain that the spirit is freed of heavy flesh and returns to the air where it can be a free life spirit." For the two deaths that occur during the story, the Mundanians place the bodies on high platforms at the edge of the city where "the ceremony of returning flesh to living flesh was officiated only by the birds. And for their

purposes, this was never heavy mourning, this was quiet rejoicing and releasing.” Ernesta explains this to Jon Lilly, describing the vultures with clear respect and gratitude.

Ernesta’s mother Donna, a Snake Clan woman, “brings [snakes] in from the countryside once a month and talks to them. This keeps them from biting people who accidentally step on them the rest of the time, and they give [her] something to think about. They give her ideas.”

Ernesta, while thinking about growing up, realizes that as a member of the Snake clan “...she herself would now be expected to enter the temple and hold continual conversations with the snakes. She would learn where they lived in the wild, and go with baskets to invite them to the gatherings of her people in which they had participated with humans for as long as the snake clan had lived in the area. Generations of the snakes had dialogued with generations of her people, she saw, and she would continue this conversation.”

Snakes, buzzards and lions are wild animals whose actions Mundanians observe, appreciate, and engage with as if these animals were peers. The Bee clan has also learned its methods of measuring and construction directly from bees themselves, who spend a lot of time sharing information among themselves about how far it is to things, and how much room will be needed in the hive, and how to build chambers to regulate the temperatures within.

The lens of Mundane's world focuses on these respected animals, while smaller, humbler or domesticated animals get hunted or stolen or worked in the background. From a wider, pulled-back angle, the bulk of animals are objects; independent or noble animal characters take up more time and space in the book but number far fewer.

Perhaps a brief passage regarding plant domestication reveals what Mundanians might say about the animals who serve them:

"Only special, sacred dancing should come near the young shoots. This special dancing was to encourage the domestication and affirm the pledge of the plants. The wild meadow dancing of Gedda could only turn their plantish minds again toward the wild mountains, forgetting their pledge and promise to bear domesticated food for the village of humans in return for concern and attention."

Here, at least, non-humans get something in exchange for what they give to humans. If some plants have agreed to this contract, then perhaps some domesticated animals have also. This is still anyone's guess, since the many plant and animals voices in the book do not include voices of the shoots or of the animals raised, worked, or killed and eaten.

The two strongest non-human voices we hear are those of plants, the scheming weed and the oak tree. Additionally, both are main characters who interact quite a bit with humans.

The scheming weed wants one thing more than anything else: to find a way to give her babies a home in which they can prosper. She sees locomotion as the solution, since the babies she has had have not been able to grow in or around the outcropping where she lives, or have been eaten. Although she knows of many ways that other plants distribute their babies, she cannot adapt and use any of those. Her hope lies in a human who has taken interest in her.

In turn, the human who has taken interest in her, Donna, has dreamed her child Ernesta from the spirit of the -scheming weed. When introducing Ernesta to her ancestor, Donna explains, "This is my spirit mate, [my old friend], who was with me when I dreamed you into the purse of my belly. Here is why your eyes are black as berries and here is why you have such fine black hairs along your arms and a strong spine....It took me years to find the proper bush but how happy I was then when I did! It gave me you!" Donna visits the scheming weed in the hills often, and sings, chants and dances to/for her.

Ultimately, Donna overvisits with the weed, chewing on her too much and dying from her poisons. The aunts rip up the weed and transplant her to their courtyard. Although Ernesta hated the weed on first sight and loathes her because "the greedy weed ha[s] eaten her mother entirely and for its own purposes," she "confides her inmost fears and furies" while sitting near the transplanted weed. When the weed hears Ernesta's problems and then hears that Ernesta's friend Margedda is critically ill, she puts a solution in

Ernesta's mind: to powder and mix some of her berries with rosewater. The aunts administer the solution, and Margedda recovers.

Ernesta realizes that, although according to the aunts her mother has sought "too much transformation when [she] becomes completely merged with her spirit mate," Donna in fact entered the weed when she died; both her mother's medical knowledge and that of the weed, Belladonna, will be available to Ernesta for the rest of her life.

Ernesta tends and waters Belladonna, sits with her, talks to her, listens to her, plants her seeds and brings seedling babies to visit their mother. The weed is deeply happy: "Belladonna who had schemed all her adult life to get out of the over-heated meadow and into a shady place was greenly comfortable now that the shade of the buildings... provided her with some head covering.... In one generation Belladonna has succeeded in having both the portability accomplished by the nettles of her youth and the protective care lavished on the millet stalks in the great standing human fields without having to give up either her independence of form or the inherent wild bitterness of her fat purple juices."

Since the aunts scorn Donna's visits to the weed early on, and seem to have ripped Belladonna out of the ground and transplanted her out of anger, not out of paying any attention to what she might want, it is fortuitous that Belladonna meets with happy results. She turns out to get just what she has wanted, with help from humans.

Despite having “overtly consumed” Donna, the aunts place equal responsibility between the weed and Donna, and welcome Belladonna as “the newest member of the Snake clan” and give her presents. The humans around her accept, respect and nurture Belladonna the scheming weed.

By contrast, the humans associating with the oak tree have more varied opinions about her:

“A tall woman driving a cart pulled by a donkey has entered the city; she has stopped by the well in the courtyard and thrown down a bucket for water....[T]he donkey...is thirsty and annoyed that water is always kept out of her reach down a long hole by the humans. The tall woman has turned shouting to the oak tree that is indecent and morally wrong to fill up a well with roots during a time of drought is it not possible to move them? ‘You’re drinking too much,’ the woman is shouting; the oak tree replies with mammoth number of drooping greens....

“Outraged that the human is spending so much attention on an immobile tree when anyone can smell perfectly good water right down there in the hole, the donkey repeats this statement out loud many times. The oak tree has been alarmed to have her roots knocked about with a bucket; she is offended and determines to grow a thicker wood callous around her more vulnerable places. Amongst the three of them they are making a great deal of racket.”

Later this scenario continues when the daughter, Jessi-Ma, of the

woman, Sonia, decides to teach the oak tree a lesson of justice. She explains to her friend Ernesta that “It’s a matter of equality, see, because the rooty old oak tree is getting everything while the people who use this well are getting nothing....’ Ernesta...hadn’t thought about the situation that way.... [Jessi-ma continues,] ‘Now the oak tree is not hot and sweaty, she has all the cool water she needs so she doesn’t know what it feels like not to have any and to be burning up in the heat. So I’m going to take these coals down there and show her.’”

After the oak tree’s roots have briefly caught on fire, Aunt Three drags Ernesta and Jessi-ma back to the oak tree, where she delivers a lengthy speech to the oak tree in their presence. Aunt Three praises the oak tree while explaining and condemning the girls’ lack of thought or respect, and subsequent actions. She makes Ernesta and Jessi-ma pay restitution to the oak in the form of daily visits, attention, water and manure.

The oak reacts: “Although the fire in her roots had gone out soon after the children went away, she hurt still, and withdrew all her generous feelings towards the city and its people for a month, which would make them uneasy and cold of heart every time they passed through the main courtyard where she lived, and caused a mild outbreak of unaccountable dissension....” In this one case, the oak tree affects humans and is subject while they are object.

In another case, the reader finds out that, long ago, the Snake clan

moved its house to live closer to the oak tree. This was on the advice of one of the grandmother Mundanes, who proclaimed “How rude of us if we make connection with them [plants] only when we gather substances from them several times a year.’...’Dialogue, dialogue, dialogue. Talk to them all the time, every day, maintain the friendship, don’t take it for granted.

“Once they lose interest in speaking to us, they will no longer tell us their healing secrets, and we will fall down a pit of stupidity and loneliness, we will lose our powers, and our intelligence, and rightly so. We will become blind mechanical counters and educated guessers. All our powers of knowing come from conversations with the earth, and for us especially from the snakes and the plants.”

Lofty ideals and noble intentions, eh? I appreciate a culture that looks beyond the knowledge and views of itself and of its own species. Yet Ernesta’s mother is the only person in the story who regularly talks with plants, and snakes as well. Although there is a period of time during which “everyday after they had eaten their morning meal the two girls [Ernesta and Margedda] went to the large courtyard and spoke to the oak tree...,” none of the five girls, three aunts, two mothers and one uncle that make up the main characters speak to plants except Donna. Ernesta sometimes listens to Belladonna, and the narrator indicates that she will continue to listen. No one else in the Snake clan maintains the dialogue that grandmother Mundane talked about.

Furthermore, Mundane's reasons for talking with plants don't sound like the friendship she mentions: in essence, she says "We have to talk with them, because if we don't they'll stop giving us gifts of knowledge and then we'll be stupid and have no power." Most good friendships rely on an equal exchange of talking and listening, knowledge shared, and balanced power. Perhaps a lonely or insecure person would get so much out of being talked to that she would offer back gifts. However, grandmother Mundane's description sounds more like humans using plants for their own aggrandizement than humans and plants swapping time and energy equally.

Aunt Three's lecture to Ernesta and Jessi-ma also sounds complimentary but has something of a using way of thinking about it: "Oak tree...you know that we are only human beings, we know very little. You know that we are graced with animal bodies, we are dependent. We do not have your immobility, your storage of memory, your longevity, your connections to other forces, your excellent judgement...

"...we do not remember what you have done for us; we forget that human beings produce nothing but other human beings; while you and your kind produce everything good and nourishing that there is on earth, with the exception of clams...in abundance enough for every one else to use. Some of us forget that but for you there would be no food, no shelter, no clothing and no fuel for fire. No cooking....

"...some of us do not remember that yours is the greatest influence

on the face of the earth, that you are the first provider, and that without you the face of the earth itself would be a wonderful though barren rock, lovely to see but with no one close by to see it.”

I like the fact that Aunt Three credits the oak tree with what she has given humans, and stresses these gifts to the young women with her. But even though Ernesta and Jessi-ma have to chant, water and fertilize the oak tree for thirty days, their attention is again the exception rather than the norm. No Mundanian appreciates the oak tree's immobility, memory, longevity, connections or judgement in actions, just in words. And the other qualities that Aunt Three reveres are products, again showing humans using plants, for which we see no exchange or repayment.

Ernesta's thoughts comment that, “the earth is quiet until someone knows to turn it over as the wind and rain turn it over; that grain is inedible grass until someone knows to swell and tend and harvest its seeds and how to dance to them and talk to them and tell them about human problems of digestion and chewing and desirability of texture and cooking...All this reminded [Mundane festival-goers] that bread is not a free form occurrence but is a collective labor, a cooperation between themselves, the earth and sky....” Once again, it's nice to see someone taking an interest in plants and talking to them -- in this case, dancing to them as well -- but even here it is for human benefit.

Mundanians lug timbers around to make houses out of so that they can “help to regulate the thought patterns and events in the room as

they had once done in the forest where they grew up during their primary life on earth," sow and tend crops to eat them, raise herbs to cut and grind them, and praise oak trees, etc. With all these plants giving themselves to humans, the only thing the humans are seen to give plants is the home that Belladonna wants.

Humans both nurture and consume plants. They don't particularly harm them before consuming them, unless you count transplanting lemons and figs from far away. Overall, Mundanians seem to be quite pleased about plants, fond of them in a way... plants don't occupy the same objecthood that animals did, since the weed and the oak tree get to do what they want, after a fashion. Mundanians recognize plants as beings, and feel thankful for what they offer, but fall short of acting in any form of equality with them. Ultimately, plants get a little subjecthood - better than none, but not deep or far-reaching.

So, how about the earth? The focus on earth-human relations falls at the end of the book, when all five girls have started their menses and prepared for their rite of passage. Together they enter a huge clay pot of steam and swirling herb essences and curl up to fall into trances. During this time they share the bodies of a buzzard, an owl and a dove, a cliff face, the local wind, and the river, on the day that Lillian died at the edge of the city.

They discover that "Between [the cliff's] surface and that of every other major body of significance such as the moon, lay nets of energy/sound, grids of communication beams that constitute a living

screen between the two containing a continuous flow of event-thoughts.

“As [Jessi-ma, the cliff] beamed her own song out onto the energy grid she recognized that rock formations everywhere on the earth’s surface are in ‘touch’ with each other through the projections of their songs onto grids a mile or so out from the earth surface. Information from surfaces on the anterior side passes along the net simultaneously....the whole makes up a giant harmonic song that mingles and transfers with songs of other mineral beings across the sky that now seemed to her no larger than a courtyard...

“In addition other nets extended through the centers of rock bodies for internal communications. The restless fiery center mind of the earth sent continual beams upward to the cooler outer bodies such as herself and she in turn beamed the thought-song out onto the energy beam grid for interaction with other stellar bodies.... Some of [the earth’s] life forms recognized the energy grid and sang into it, connecting to the earth-star memory conversation while others, including a few of the humans who as a group were the most dependent of creatures, were forgetting about the energy grid, and becoming disengaged.”

Poor Jessi-ma discovers that her Bee clan, especially her mother Sonia and her Aunt Lillian, have become so wrapped up in their own measuring and planning and building that they have forgotten to consult this old, broad, deep source of information in their planning.

Lillian “does not trust interconnection, she can only follow her own single stream of energy without reference to the multitudes of beams around her, and this singleness of focus also terrifies her because of its incompleteness so that she acts out of fear rather than connection;” “[she] cannot keep any time with any being except her own....”

The site at which Sonia and Lillian have located the new temple interferes badly with the energy song grid, knocking Ernesta in her buzzard body out of flight. Her reaction: “That interference place knocked me out of the sky twice.... A person could get killed by that stupidly located human contraption.”

Fran-keen as the wind helps keep the Ernesta buzzard in the sky, and Jessi-ma as the cliff with all its information understands the problem thoroughly. “[T]he location is situated directly in the center of a complex lateral power grid necessary to a number of the animals and birds who live in and pass through the territory of Mundane’s world, and who use it to orient themselves to the turning of the seasons as well as spatially to other locations on the surface of the earth that they might use for migratory or other purposes.”

Jessi-ma sees that Lillian died because a lion rushed at her, trying to stop her from continued work on the temple and trying to communicate with her. Lillian is so frightened and so dis-connected from non-human forms of information that “instead of facing the lion and making any attempt to enter its time and decipher its

motives” or listening to what the cliff Jessi-ma is vainly trying to broadcast to her, she panics all the way and runs off the edge of the cliff.

At no point did either Lillian or Sonia listen to the earth to realize what Jessi-ma, sharing the body of the cliff face, can see: “that in the south bend of the river lies another crossroad of horizontal energy grids that interconnect and carry beam songs directly from deep in the center of the earth. A temple situated on that spot would magnify fundamental earthly information directly out to other major stellar bodies of the cosmos.”

Few other scenes in the book address human-earth interactions. Before the time of the story, the Bee clan drains a marsh to make more gardens, and travels to a volcano eruption to gather ash to use. Quarries, gold and silver all occur in the story. And Jessi-ma the cliff sees that, long in the future, “tiny explosions of fire occurred in conjunction with activities of humans who were gouging at her innards with portable shovels,” but this does not apply to the existing city of Mundane.

If the reader is to judge from this one interaction, around which the ribbon plot of the story has pivoted, no characters in the book, Bee clan or otherwise, have talked with or listened to the earth for a long time. If not for the trances of the girls, the city would have gone ahead and built a temple in a place that would have cut off communications in the energy song grid, and would have disturbed a number of animals and birds.

Collectively the girls, now women, realize that their lifelong goal will be to re-connect the humans of Mundane to the earth. Their rite-visions give them the insight, opportunity and responsibility to pass this warning of dis-connection on to their city and pass on the means by which to re-connect with the earth.

One other event sheds light on Mundane humans' dealings with the non-human. During the mid-summer festival, the Tortoise clan of farming drums, sings and dances to the weather and the earth "in behalf of the high hope of harvest and to entreat patient endurance for the dry crops now struggling to hold up their heads in the fields outside the city." Some of the players take on the part of the crops, "voicing both their moist grainy hopes and their dry grainy fears."

Then just after the mid-summer festival, the Bee clan feels it to be their responsibility as architects of water in the city as well as buildings to bring an end to the drought. Accordingly, they hold a raindance. "A raindance was a configuration of women dancing out in the open in a special place and making dew together, so that Ana of the clouds would get so excited she would pour down her juices, which often happened..."

"Everyone shouted lusty provocative invocations to Ana of the clouds and some people went off together into the bushes...Ana loved all of it never failing to respond and even if she didn't shake down some dew of her own the very first night she almost always managed to

thunder.”

These are two scenes in which Mundanians to talk to not the earth of dirt, but the larger Ana earth which includes the atmosphere and water. Here Mundanians are taking action, actually spending time and energy, to connect with the earth.

Unfortunately, as with so many of us, they have waited until a crisis (the drought) to take action. But while the Mundane humans may not taken action earlier -- say, have had any conversations or taken any actions that could have helped prevent a drought, or listened to the earth to find the source of the drought -- they are at least approaching her. After all, they could just have decided to make a huge channel of some sort to re-route water from some other area, and are choosing a more balanced solution instead.

Sonia of the Bee clan and Aunt Three become very zealous in their excitement during the raindance, and do not slow down when the other dancers do. The narrator does not clearly reveal how much their zeal causes the floods that the raindance bring, but the Tortoise clan blames the Bee clan and the Bee clan leaves the city feeling hurt and rejected. So, even though the dancers reach out to connect, perhaps Sonia and Aunt Three get wrapped up in themselves and do not listen to the changes in the earth, just as Lillian never listened to the earth to begin siting the new temple. At least in this scene, humans began by conversing with her.

And a beginning is what I think the humans have made a fine one of in Mundane's world. Yes, Mundane characters have a welter of opinions about any one thing. They seem almost to reflect the words of friends I used to spend Shabbis with: "if there are five Jews in a room, they'll be sure to have at least six opinions." But overall, Mundane humans pay more attention to and believe in the separate, different views of plant, animal and earth beings than our culture does.

Despite the author's red herring of giving voices to beings that Mundanians themselves don't seem to hear, most humans in Mundane at least regularly see and think about those beings. The main characters talk with great intent about plants, already treat some animals as peers, and sing and dance their requests of the sky's water. Therein lies the hope for me.

Although the majority of Mundanians unthinkingly accept otherness and non-human points of view, they still behave mostly by looking at things from a human-only point of view, relegating most non-humans to objecthood. But their very acceptance of there being non-human ways of looking at things makes it possible for them to take the next step, that of beings sharing separate but equal roles, having similar power and freedom of choice.

Of all the characters, the five young women, Ernesta, Jessi-ma, Margedda, Fran-keen and Dee, are the ones we know to actually experience separate and different non-human views. Whether their

being in a drugged state (so the steamy herbs seem to impart) matters or not, they have *been* birds, earth, water, and seen the world from those beings' viewpoints. They in particular hold the most hope for me.

They not only have the perspective but, as the author intimates, the need and personal quest to re-connect with the non-human. Since these five young women, despite their human bickering, all appear to be fairly empathetic people, I hope that in their reconnecting they would listen to other beings and take non-human wants and needs into consideration when they act - and that they would then turn Mundanians gently towards acting in co-subjecthood with other beings in Mundane, and leave as much objecthood and inequality behind. They are already on their way.

CAROL SEVERANCE, REEFSONG, 1991

Summary

Reefsong, complete with garish science fiction cover, is the story of Angie, an environmental anthropologist, and World Life Company, the greedy, heartless business that monopolizes all arable land and food production on Earth. World Life wants to hire Angie to investigate a problem on Lesaat, a water planet. But Angie is a mountain gal, and well up in the ranks of troubleshooters;—she chooses not to go to Lesaat. When a forest fire traps Angie, ruins her hands, and leaves her unconscious, World Life takes the opportunity to grow “squid” hands on her, and gills as well as lungs - turning her into a waterworlder against her will.

The waterworld of Lesaat produces an enzyme that allows humans -- most critically, those on impossibly overpopulated Earth -- to digest grains alone and convert them into amino acids which in turn combine to produce complete proteins. The enzyme is produced by simple blue-green algae, but requires vast, clean oceans in which to grow. Angie’s mission is twofold: to find hidden records of the “total conversion” process, rather than the partial-conversion process on which Earth is currently subsisting; and to save the most lushly productive reef on Lesaat, Pukui.

World Life has stopped all harvest at Pukui until the waterworlders give up the TC records. World Life’s pressure comes from the fact

that if the algae is not harvested, it will overmature, escape its pens, and completely kill the Pukui reef. But the waterworlders honestly don't know where the TC records have been hidden and so can't produce them to save Pukui.

Angie refuses to accept the assignment and intends to fight to get her land-hands and lungs-only breathing back, until she meets thirteen year-old Pua - the only child of Lesaat, whom the World Life Company is detaining quite questionably on Earth. Pua convinces Angie that World Life is criminally stockpiling the partial-conversion enzyme - and by now, Angie has a big vendetta with World Life, and wants to uncover any illegalities she can.

Angie and Pua travel to Pukui on Lesaat. There Angie meets Pua's uncles, Fatu and Toma, and eventually understands that Pua's now-dead parents hid the TC records before they died, and that no one knows where they are. Fatu and Toma are also hunting for them, intending to use the TC process as a bargaining tool: -they will exchange the TC records for full acceptance by the U.N. and World Life of a secret second generation of waterworlders -- children -- as the rightful heirs of Lesaat.

The remainder of the story follows Angie as she uncovers evidence of World Company's hand in the murder of Pua's parents, plans to destroy Pukui reef and therefore renege on their leases to waterworlders, the setup of the fire in which Angie became conveniently injured and unconscious on Company time, etc.

Ultimately the waterworlders and Company representatives end up in an underwater showdown at Sa Le Fe'e, the remote Pukui site where the second-generation kids are hidden and protected.

The bad guys are captured or killed, the worst bad guy confesses under a truth drug to World Company's crimes, a sizeable U.N. team witnesses all and gives planetary rights to the children, and so Pukui births a new people, culture and civilization on Lesaat. In the course of all this Angie has gradually become so enamored of the people and the world that she decides—to stay, "listen[ing] for the sound of whispering evergreens and [finding] it right where it had always been, singing sibilant accompaniment to [the oceans'] rumbling roar."

Analysis

Depending on how you look at it, one of the joys or frustrations of reading a rich, complex book is that you can't necessarily pin it down with a single conclusive analysis afterwards. Pua, with Fatu and Toma in the background, represents the Pukui culture. She and they say, do, and act in such a variety of ways with regard to the plants, plant-animals, animals and environment of Pukui that there is no one simple measure of their behavior and sentiments. My best option for my reader is to describe the major relationships and present a more intuitive conclusion than I have for other books in this study.

Although the book is based on the farming and harvesting of algae, neither Pua nor the uncles seem to have much reaction to it. Pua hates the threat of the algae escaping - when World Life first introduced it to Lesaat, its growers did nothing to contain the algae. It grew and spread so fast and became so thick that "within a single storm season, three entire atolls were turned into useless hulks. It would be a hundred years or more before a fully functioning coral ecology could re-form, if it ever could at all."

Pua spends lots of time checking out and cursing the unharvested and swelling algae pens, but ceases to worry once Angie orders the algae harvested before the storm season begins. Pua clearly understands her future ownership of Pukui, an establishment whose central activity is algae farming, and feels fiercely possessive and protective of the reef's lands and waters, but never mentions nor relates to the algae except when it is nearing overmaturity.

The fact that it is alien to the reef, and that great effort has to be made constantly to contain it so that it will not harm the reef, does not seem to occur to Pua, Fatu or Toma. In Pua's case, this may be because she is a young teenager, or because "her babies" (the ten second-generation waterworlder kids) occupy her serious focus. It may also present the first way in which Pua does not think as seriously or as deeply about the ocean as she makes herself out to.

On the other hand, Pua does relate to some of the natural plants around her as she frequently adorns herself with "friendly vines,"

seaweed, and moss as bracelets and anklets. When she spends a day secretly waiting for Angie to come out of a cave she is investigating, Pua “braid[s] clinger vines and wrap[s] them in patterns around her legs and arms. She w[ea]ve[s] herself a headband of paperflowers and count[s]the spore spots on the undersides of fern leaves” to entertain herself.” The jungle plants around her provide decoration, later also serve as food, seats and paraphernalia at welcoming ceremony, and eventually protect her during an underwater knife-fight. But, with true adolescent aplomb, she takes them for granted, uses and enjoys them, but shows no regard for them.

In the long run, the TC records turn out to be written on paper, hidden in containers made of Hawaiian koa wood, and sealed inside “snow trees.” These trees are white in bark and leaves, and originally existed scattered all over the Pukui atoll. Pua’s mother, Lehua, transplanted them all to the top of the atoll’s hill to create a faux snow-capped peak, to look like Mauna Kea near where she had grown up. Pua’s comment is “they got big like this after Mama moved them up here. They like the sun.”

This brings an interesting question to mind: if the trees actively like the sun, and would not get much of it in their natural setting, how acceptable is it for Lehua to have moved them? I have my own conflict over this, the two points being: everything belongs where it occurs in its own ecosystem; and, if a tree wants to be somewhere else, and it won’t hurt anything, it should get to go there.

This is essentially a question of “good for the individuals (what the trees want, assuming they would want to move to the sun) or good for the group (what the ecosystem needs, assuming the snow trees play a role in it). I don’t have an answer for this one, and the larger philosophical conflict is an age-old question. Perhaps Fatu has a Pukui answer when at one point he bemoans not being able to kill one of the Company bad guys since he is needed as a witness, and says “Always, it came back to this. The greater good for the greater number.”

I have no answer about the more abstract question, but for the specifics of Reefsong, I say how acceptable it was for Lehua to move the trees depends on how much the trees wanted to, were opposed to, or were neutral about moving, and whether Lehua consulted them. Lehua is presented, post mortem, as having been quite sensitive to life and beings around her. She is one of three people on Lesaat for whom the trees will open (see below). Perhaps she consulted them, and they somehow communicated that it was alright with them; perhaps she moved them without considering them, to make her Mauna Kea Iki to suit her own desires. We don’t know.

What we do know is that the trees contain cavities where they make balls of sap, “snowballs,” and that only Lehua, Pua and Angie can sense where the snowballs are. If any one of the trio scrapes at the bark where a snowball is, the tree will crack open for them; for anyone else, the scraping only injures the tree. Pua explains, “the trees only open for people they like.” Fatu and Toma have run

instruments over the trees, searching for the TC records, but their instruments sense only inorganic material. They never think of an all-organic method of hiding the records, and cannot get inside the trees without harming them, which they don't do.

When Angie finally figures out where the records are, she hopes that a tree will open for her. She, a mountain person, has spent time meditating there and "talking to the trees and actually listening for an answer. It was good to feel strong and healthy...in her spirit." The tree opens for her and she exclaims. "Ha! I guess this tree likes me." She, like Pua when she goes after snowballs, is very careful to smooth the bark back over the crack after taking the records out. As with Pua, the bark quickly melts back together, closing back up and showing no evidence of the cavity. "[Angie] thanked the tree silently for sharing its treasure." Although I can never know whether the trees wanted to move, they can discern among people and choose only three for whom to open.

So, on to the plant-animals. Again Pua, our main representative-of-Pukui, has different reactions to a class of beings. The two plant-animals that she deals with are a series of slime molds, and moat grass. The most significant of the slime molds is one that 'guards' the entrance to Sa Le Fe'e: "The colors on the wall...swept in spiraling designs...A figure began to form. It was the face of an old man, lined and toothless under a shock of pure white hair." Here I believe that Pua reacts more to the face itself, about which she says "I pretend sometimes that he's Le Fe'e, so we can watch each other

while we talk,” than the slime molds themselves.

In other scenes, slime molds form curtains to cover hiding places in Sa Le Fe'e, appearing to grow on solid walls. When Sa Le Fe'e is attacked, and with it both these curtains and the old man, Pua is focused entirely on saving the children hidden there and has no reaction. Although she says at the end of the book “Le Fe'e told me he's going to grow the Grand Old Man back to guard the door just like he did before,” she is once again intent on the figure the slime molds form, and not the slime molds themselves. She is fond of the set that forms the old man, and disregards the others, as she does plants.

In contrast, Pua pays active attention to a piece of moat grass set at Pukui's front door, named Matt: “Pua scuffed her bare feet clean on the door mat. Matt burped and shifted comfortably, tickling her softened soles. [Angie] turned slightly pale and swallowed hard,” and the larger swath of moat grass from which Matt has come: “[Pua] ran ahead, scuffing her feet across the ground to set the grass moving. ‘It likes to be tickled,’ she called. The grass burped softly in several places.” She seems fond of Matt. However, she is also willing to pluck bits of him to use to herd nightcrawlers, which helps her escape when Fatu has confined her. Later, when Fatu finds Matt plucked, he gently puts Matt near the house so that “Matt could make its own way back to the door,” saying “You can't create a future unless you care about the little things right along with the big ones.”

My guess is that the Pukui folk have given Matt a name and credit him with some degree of personhood because he can move, make noises, and be interacted with as an individual, which even the larger moat grass is not. The slime molds' ability to move does not represent agency to Pua and Fatu, and slime molds are a collective being. Of course, we have only the author's description of how Matt or the moat grass react to serving their roles...maybe those burps are actually cries of pain? I would guess not, because I believe both Pua and Fatu to be both more attuned to their surroundings, as continuing discussion will show, and kinder than that. So, Pua, Fatu and Toma give Matt recognition, probably some affection, but no initiative or choice in action.

Which leads us to the many animals of the Pukui reef, and most evident among them, the reef rays. The events in Reefsong take place over a number of weeks, and during any given day Pua probably spends at least as much, if not more, of her time in the water than on land with humans. In the water, the reef rays are her frequent companions. When I first read the book, I decided that Pua really used her ray companions - that almost all of their actions conveniently served her and that, no matter how sweetly presented, this was basically a slave-master relationship. As I read the book compiling notes, however, a thing jumped out at me which had not before: there are a number of times when the reef rays refuse to do something that Pua is doing or wants to do, and a number of times when they do something of their own initiative, without Pua's influence.

However, the role in which the reader most often sees the rays is that of them offering rides to Pua, Angie or Fatu. A lot of the book takes place in various moments of crisis, and often it is important for the humans to get from one place to another in a hurry underwater. Sometimes at these points the rays are already there and they either simply lift under the humans or Pua asks them for a ride. The rays understand Pukui's click-speech, a language based on clicks of the waterworlders' claw-like nails. Pua reports to Angie and the others what the rays say. At other times, Pua calls them using the click-speech, or they simply appear.

An algae farmer once comments "you saw how she ordered those rays around;" but a slightly different interpretation comes late in the book when Angie muses, "she wondered, not for the first time, why these great, gray creatures allowed themselves to be ruled by such a tiny, human child. Then she thought of her own association with Pua and acknowledged that she and the rays had something in common. 'Pua controls us all,' she said..." Even Fatu "was amazed at how calm the giant creatures were in the turbulent water. They seemed entirely under Pua's control."

It was because of these comments, and because the book several times draws parallels between the rays and horses, or calls a ray someone's "mount," that I concluded that the rays served Pua. But they also will not go very near the overmature algae pens, will not visit with Pua when she's angry, drop their riders off when the

water shallows, which they don't like, and refuse to take Angie, Toma or Pili near Pua as she fights off one of the Company bad guys, showing that they make choices of their own.

The most serious action that a ray takes is towards the end of the book, during an underwater showdown between the Company goons and waterworlders. The Company has a sub in the water, and on the sub are detonators which will blow up Sa Le Fe'e, and the second generation of kids there. Pili, the oldest of these kids besides Pua, rides a ray towards the sub. The ray flips him off as it nears the sub, and rams itself not only into but mostly through the sub, destroying both the people aboard and the detonators. The ray mangles and gashes itself doing so, but also saves Sa Le Fe'e. Has the ray chosen this? Has Pili's click-talk beforehand given it information that it uses to choose with, or did Pili command it? I have reread this passage, and I still find that I can interpret it either way, depending on how hopeful or bleak a slant I bring to it.

The ultimate answers about the rays could benefit from some background help, which we readers do not have. We do not see how the relationship between Pua and the rays begins, how it develops, and how aligned or conflicting Pua and the rays' actions are over the course of that development. As it is, the rays could fall anywhere in the range of doting-on-Pua-like-puppies-but-occasionally-being-stubborn to full equals simply choosing to agree with many of Pua's choices of actions. My own opinion is that the author was concentrating more on the plot and the overall setting than on this

relationship. As a result, reading about the relationship reveals some inconsistencies, making it difficult to interpret exactly how much independence the rays are meant to have or actually have.

Pua's actions with regard to other animals reveals a variety of treatments too. In particular, she resolves two different animal-human conflicts in two very different ways. In the first, Angie has just ordered algae workers to harvest the most overmature of the algae pens. The overmature algae has badly damaged the reef under and around it, making a barren rather than vibrant seascape. Out of these empty surroundings comes a *puhi*, or rock eel, who attacks an injured and vulnerable swimmer. Pua points out that the *puhi*, a solitary creature, has lost its normal source of prey and would not be attacking a human if it were not starving.

The *puhi*'s vehemence and uncharacteristic lack of fear halts the much-needed harvest. The harvest boss wants to bomb the *puhi*'s lair, to which it has retreated. Pua suggests instead that a team inside a sub lure the *puhi* out with food it likes and lead it to a living part of the reef, thereby removing it from the site of the harvest, not harming the *puhi*, and helping it out of its human-imposed starvation. Angie implements Pua's idea, which turns out to be successful. No humans hurt, no *puhis* hurt, and the harvest can get back underway pronto. During the event Pua speaks of "brother *puhi*," and Fatu mentions "friend *puhi*." And Pua and Fatu as act as friends indeed.

I can't say the same for Pua's interactions with coilers, snake-like animals that drift about the reef until they touch something, around which they instantly coil tightly. The animals range from worm-sized to canoe-sized, and Pua deals with both extremes. The tiny and small ones she uses as bracelets and anklets. Although she is sometimes out of the water with them, the reader cannot know how coilers fare in the air. And, Pua has to uncoil them and pull them open-- a medium-sized one quite strongly, after Fatu insists she take it off because it's cutting off her circulation -- either to adorn herself with or take them off. If my natural state were coiled upon touch, I doubt that being pulled into a straight line would feel comfortable. Coilers exhibit no choice, no communication, and appear only as Pua manipulates them.

The most impressive example of this is when Pua is urgently trying to drum up an unsuspecting way of stopping an investigating Company crew from Earth on its way Pukui. This also is one of the more questionable moments she has with the rays, as she click-talks to them and they return with "the great-great grandmother of all coilers" carried in their teeth, which "twisted and writhed in their grasp...making a tremendous effort to spring inward around the rays." The rays carry the coiler directly into the pathway of the hydrobus, where they let go of her. As the hydrobus hits the coiler, she instantly coils around it. This stops the bus effectively and, seemingly, naturally.

Pua cries out praises of the coiler, ending with "Oh, I love that

mama coiler! I do” and then “laugh[s] and stroke[s] the crowding rays, praising their strength and agility and fantastic bravery...” Later we learn that the only way the coiler will let go is by firing lasers at it, which may or may not work and which may kill it. On the very last page of the book, we find out that the coiler has let go on its own and drifted away (see discussions of Le Fe’e below), so there is a happy ending - but, regardless of the desperate circumstances, Pua chooses to use another being, the coiler, knowing that that being may be injured or killed.

She reports that the rays “said after that it was fun, and wanted to do it again, but I wouldn’t let ‘em, ‘cause we only needed to do it once. And anyway, I don’t think Le Fe’e would have give us another coiler. This one might get killed if they try to user lasers on her.” Although I appreciate what discretion she shows after the fact, I believe she would not have been as cavalier about using one of her human relatives in a similar way. Then again - she is Pua, headstrong, determined, a teen, and sure-fire bound to save Pukui reef.

The one other species that occurs a number of times in the book is nightcrawlers. These appear to be kin to caterpillars, are handsomely colored, and come out at night to roam around the land portions of Pukui. With two moons and a lot of bioluminescent life, Lesaat doesn’t get very dark at night, but neither is it bright, and nightcrawlers burst a mating sack when they encounter bright light.

Reefsong readers encounter nightcrawlers early in the book, when

Company inspectors investigate a Pukui burial cave with bright lamps. Chapter 2 begins and ends, "A nightcrawler, confused by the unnatural glare of fluorescent lamps, crawled into the light, flipped onto its side, and punctured its dye sack. Fatu glanced toward the small sound and sighed, saddened yet further by the creature's mistake. Only during the phosphorescence of true night did the nightcrawlers' procreative spores become viable. This one had give its life for nothing...." and "[As they left] the soft pop and hiss of another ill-fated nightcrawler followed [Fatu] from the shadows."

Lesaat residents build their houses raised up off the ground so that nightcrawlers won't wander in, and Pua and Fatu sprinkle moat grass around themselves to keep the nightcrawlers off one evening when they sleep on the beach. Both these methods effectively keep the nightcrawlers away without harming them and are, whether intentionally or not, respectful methods. Fatu takes other nightcrawlers' deaths later in the book seriously, and at one point sings a mourning song that so many are dying during the series of crises at Pukui.

Yet Pua's first words re nightcrawlers are "they make good bait if you know how to hook them without hitting the dye sack," and her later involvement with them is to use six nightcrawlers to make noises in her room as they move about, fall, and eventually burst their mating sacks, so that Fatu will think she is in the room. As with plants and with coilers, this is Pua-willing-to-make-use-of-whatever/whoever-is-around-her. Neither Fatu nor Pua make moves

to protect nightcrawlers, and Pua herself chooses to kill them on more than one occasion. Only Fatu shows sorrow over these little deaths.

So why do I still strongly like Pua, and the Pukui reefholders in general? What actions towards their surroundings lead me to value them when a number of plants and animals suffer injury, being used and ignored, and/or death? The answer lies in the Lesaat oceans, in Pukui reef, and especially, with Le Fe'e. And who, you may ask, is this Le Fe'e? Well, that question and its answer is one of the richest ribbons of the book.

Pua talks about Le Fe'e constantly, and it takes Angie a while to understand that Le Fe'e is not a corporeal person, and the full length of the book to decide for herself whether he exists at all. To Pua, there is no question that he exists. Technically, Le Fe'e "is a creature out of Samoan myth, a kind of demigod that was believed in the old days to live deep in the Pacific Ocean." Pua tells a story that Le Fe'e tired of Earth as it grew spoiled, went searching the universe via the wormhole, and chose Pukui as "the richest and most exquisitely beautiful site" in which to live.

Much of why I cherish Pua comes from how naturally she talks to Le Fe'e and intersperses bits of what Le Fe'e says in her conversation with others. A skeptical reader might be tempted to write Pua off as crazy - if not for Angie, herself a mountain-and-pines woman, who hears Le Fe'e. As soon as Angie goes underwater, even in a

small sub before she takes up deep swimming, Angie hears singing: "This ocean is like a visual, tactile symphony....So much movement and color and texture. It sings, just like [the mountains]...there's such a sense of balance....There aren't many places left on Earth that sing so joyously of their own existence."

This is Le Fe'e's voice, and further on it affects Angie more strongly: "It *is* like a symphony...She smiled, releasing a stream of bubbles from between her teeth. It's like a dance! She could hear the reef singing. It called to her, assured her she was safe here in her home...'No,' she said...'This is not my home!' This insidious sea...sang a siren's song...If she hadn't known better, she could almost have believed the reef was alive and sentient, calling out to her in its resonant, symphonic voice...'Save your songs for your children, Le Fe'e!' she said out loud... What am I doing? she thought suddenly. Talking to the damned ocean as if it could hear me."

Just as the final battle of good guys vs. bad guys begins at the tail end of the book, Angie calls out "Le Fe'e, if you exist, this would be a good time.."and gets cut off as the fighting begins - and soon after Angie becomes the only character to see what may be Le Fe'e:

"Waight was drawn away, away and down. Something dark and thick had wrapped around the old woman's legs. Angie blinked. Waight screamed...and bent to scrape her hand along her thighs.

"There's nothing there, Angie told herself. She's just caught in a current. She blinked again, but could see only inky darkness

engulfing Waight's lower body. Waight stared up at Angie. She cried out and lifted her hands. She screamed and shrieked...and disappeared."After the battle has ended and Angie is swimming back to Pukui atoll, Angie whispers "I don't know what you are [as Le Fe'e rumbled and roared around her]. I don't even know if you are. But you sing a fireloving fine song."

In the meantime Fatu, who begins the book by saying he wishes he could believe in Le Fe'e as thoroughly as Pua does, has also heard Le Fe'e: "Wind gusted in [on them], spinning storm debris across the abruptly terrified humans...'It's Le Fe'e, you fools!...'Listen! Do you hear it?... That is the cry of Le Fe'e. It is the death-cry of a god." He wondered if it were possible for a man's soul to break. How can I hear it so clearly? he wondered. How can I know just what it says?"

Fatu leaves Pukui atoll saying "If you have a god you pray to, spend this night praying that Le Fe'e has the strength to reach the western horizon before Pukui is ripped entirely from the sea....do not follow me outside...No unprotected Earthers will survive [the storm] tonight. Le Fe'e has promised me that. Your only haven is this cave...." The book describes Fatu's journey through the storm to Sa Le Fe'e as "Fatu... appeared sometime during the night, at what sounded like the height of the storm. He did not say how he had gotten there. It must have been via the rays, but there was something in his expression that encouraged Angie not to ask...[Pua's] eyes widened slightly when she saw Fatu...Like Angie, she did not ask Fatu how he had gotten from the burial cave to her side."

The women's reticence in asking, the fact that all of the Pukui reef rays seemed to be engaged in the battle, and the implied and unanswered question of Fatu's travel lead me to wonder if Le Fe'e didn't help Fatu get to Sa Le Fe'e. Le Fe'e is the spirit, the soul of Pukui reef. None of the other books I studied address a human-land spirit relationship directly, but the love, awe, admiration and respect that Pua, Fatu and even sometimes Angie express is part of what makes me appreciate the Pukui folk and their ways.

The other piece that makes me love the Pukuians is this: they live in their land. There are two further pieces of this: one, that they are almost always outside, with buildings hardly ever the setting for events; and, that they live three-dimensionally, humans among a zillion kinds of life teeming in all directions around them. Although many of them were originally Pacific Islanders, accustomed to the ocean, they still were land-based. On Lesaat, a human person goes inside usually at the end of a day, to eat the evening meal and to sleep. While other books in this study take place in towns or communities or maybe in fields, Reefsong takes place in the ocean. At one point in the water Angie says "We need to go somewhere where we can talk." Pua replies "We're someplace right now."

Furthermore, the ocean, and especially Pukui reef, give Pua something she needs. When Pua is on Earth and wants to go home, she says "I want you to take me to Pukui...my reef on Lesaat" rather than "my town" or "my house." When Pua has returned to Pukui for a

little while, Angie comments that “the place itself was slowly filling that terrible emptiness [Pua] had tried to hide...” Much of narrative includes pieces that say things like, “the water closed over Pualei like a blessing,” “she needed the ocean’s silken touch, the echoing songs of Le Fe’e. She needed the sweet taste of the reef and her family,” that the ocean caresses her, “she needed the rays and the touch of the sea,” “she no had friends except for Fatu and Pukui itself,” that it provides an “infinitely varied and exciting touch.” Pua says “I live in Lesaat’s great golden sea with my family,...peopled only by creatures who know how to smile with their eyes.”

Even Fatu’s traditional Samoan-based tattoos are of the patterns of the sea and the land. Angie, from her environmental anthropologist viewpoint, points out to Fatu and Toma that Pukui’s emerging “customs and traditions - they’re nothing without the land. Not here, where they’re all made up to start with.” The very basis on which Angie claims rights for the second-generation Lesaat children is a portion of the U.N.’s definition of indigenous peoples which states that a native people must “live in intimate proximity with their environment.” Pukuians do live with their sea intimately.

Upon arriving at Pukui, Pua stresses to Angie that the ocean requires people to pay attention to everything to survive. By the end of the book, I think the ocean itself has converted Angie into a waterworlder, even moving her through her overwhelming fear of deep water. The last line of the book, a joke of sorts, is Pua

repeating to Angie “You’re a waterworlder now. You have to pay attention to *everything* - all the time.” The joke is that Angie has learned to do that, learned so well that she has found the TC records, saved Pukui, and been welcomed and wanted among the waterworlders.

Although I sometimes balk at Pua’s flippant actions and wish that she would think through to farther-reaching consequences, I too would join Angie in living at Pukui, and rejoice in a community of constant conscious relation with the many-lives world around me.

CONCLUSION

I said that my goal was to find hope, in the form of humans recognizing non-human agency and non-humans evidencing agency, within these novels and pass that on to other readers. As I read each book more closely, I was surprised to find less hope (less non-human agency or selfhood) in most than I had originally felt. Closer examination often turned up fine rhetoric among the novels' characters, but actions that did not necessarily match the rhetoric. The humans in most of these books did not walk their talk.

However, each book does improve upon our current human relationships with Earth and its plants, animals and land. In only one book, Wanderground, did humans meet my original measure of hope, recognizing plants, animals and the land itself as equal. Although I found no other story that evidenced this equality, I found a second source of hope in the other stories.

At some point in each of the other books, humans recognize the point of view of a non-human. Recognizing a non-human point of view admits some subjecthood in another being: that being is no longer entirely object, entirely property. Although it is less hope than I originally thought I had found, it is a step in the right direction. Before you can recognize a non-human as equal, you must recognize it as subject. And before you can recognize it as thoroughly subject, you must recognize it as somewhat subject.

Below I will rank the seven books of the study in order of least subject-recognized to most subject-recognized.

Woman on the Edge of Time remains closest of the books to our current relationships with non-humans. Woman acknowledges the non-human perspective of Tilia, a cat. Beyond that, Matta'ns do not wonder about or talk with plants, animals or the land. They breed plants and animals for food and seem to slaughter them in much the same fashion we do.

The land acts as a warehouse of resources. Although Matta'ns are careful to use only as many resources as the land can resupply, they still relate to it from an androcentric, property point of view. The only characteristics of the land they align themselves with are building around fragile ecosystems, using solar and other "alternative" energies, and adapting to weather that they have the technology to change. There is no non-human point of view apart from Tilia's. Even the Earth Advocate asks only that resource-use match human populations, and does not speak for the earth itself.

Daughters of A Coral Dawn seems slightly more considerate of Maternas, the planet on which its women settle. The settlers choose an area to live in where they will have least impact on the wild populations, and build their homes and buildings accepting even violent characteristics of the land. They quickly understand the area plants' stabilizing role in the ecosystem and leave them alone. The book does not explain what clearing they do or do not do as they establish their settlement.

Maternas' women do follow the lead of the indigenous primate of the land, the whoofie, in learning to shelter themselves during strong evening winds. And, the settlers do not bring domesticated animals with them, nor do they domesticate any of the animals on Maternas. It is unclear, however, what feelings and values account for why they do not - the book simply presents no domestic animals, without comment. The only animals they eat appear to be fish. These they do not regard as individuals, but only as parts of the ocean - which, as in Woman, acts as a food warehouse.

Overall, the settlers act as if they vaguely recognize a spirit of the planet which they respect, but do not recognize a point of view of any individual non-human except the brief lesson from the whoofie.

There is a small continuous theme of non-human viewpoint in The Kin of Ata Are Waiting For You: each animal shown has chosen to spend its time in the company of a human. Having no voices, the animals do not explain to readers why they choose to do this, but they do.

Furthermore, eating an animal is unheard of and would probably be considered barbaric. This implies some consideration of what being killed and eaten would be like from the animals' point of view. Even though Atans do not mention the land, and do cultivate plants, they farm simply and mildly, and do ascribe some feelings and wishes to animals. For this reason I rank Ata third of the books.

The real strength of the Kesh society in Always Coming Home is that

they constantly speak to the non-human beings around them. It particularly impresses me that they speak to rocks, which seem to be furthest along the human/less-human/non-human scale, most alien. But they also speak to water, plants and animals. Speaking to non-humans recognizes their subjecthood, and several places in the book describe an event or situation from a non-human point of view.

Plus, some of the animals are commensals, a word LeGuin chooses specifically to demonstrate a "living together with humans" relationship rather than a "living for humans" relationship. Contrarily, the Kesh domesticate and slaughter a number of animals, and hunt wild animals. At least in these cases the killer chants or sings a phrase or song to the animal, again recognizing it as more than merely property or an object.

The Kesh split their associations with plants between gathering from wild plants and cultivating domestic plants. The former receive heyas (hellos with a measure of respect), but not much more, and the latter remain objects/property.

The populations of towns in the area of Stone Telling, the author of the longest story, are small, thinly dispersed, and straggling in layout. In this way, the humans are in constant contact with the land in that it is all around them. The world is divided among the five houses of the earth and the four houses of the sky. Festivals throughout the year recognize humans as being only a part of the makeup of the world, and one that needs to be kept in balance with other parts. However, outside

of these festivals, I do not notice the Kesh recognizing land itself.

It seems that, on a daily basis, the Kesh recognize individual beings more often than the larger whole. Although the larger whole underpins the values of Kesh society, it is individual non-humans with whom humans have relationships. These relationships offer a mix of subjecthood/considering their point of view, and object/property status to non-humans.

And a mix is what Mundane's World offers readers. Mundane's World is the book in which I was most unhappy to find less subjecthood than I had originally thought to find, and I think it presents contradictory information. On the one hand, maybe 25-40% of the book is told from the point of view of a plant or an animal. That in itself should accord a lot of subjecthood to those beings. But the book's characters focus on non-human points of view mostly in a single scene at the end of the book. Before that point, the story shows animals as pets or food or tools, and plants as a mix of independent beings and food or tools. Mundanians seem to accord far less subjecthood to plants, animals and the land than the author does.

Still, the book has significant passages in which a non-human shapes the course of the city's actions: a weed seduces a woman and overwhelms her to the point of death, thereby changing the structure of authority in the city; a lion interferes in the building of a new temple long enough that the main characters can realize the temple is cutting off the earth's information to other beings. And on and off the characters describe something from a non-human's point of view.

However, Mundanians still domesticate, kill, and eat animals and plants and hunt animals without commenting on their captivity, slaughter or harvest. And they do not imagine or seek the point of view of the land. This disconnection leads to the death of a character before the beginning of the story, and is the central wrong which the main characters realize they must right at the very end of the story. They will spend their adult lives encouraging their peers to reconnect with the land and its denizens, and nurture them in doing so.

Reefsong also shows a mix of viewpoints. The humans' existence on the planet is based on farming an introduced algae. But it is the bad guys, World Life Company, who have introduced and are farming the algae. The Pukui clan of algae farmers do their job merely as a job, and concentrate instead on establishing a new society, a new people that will live in harmony with the planet.

Pua, Fatu, Toma, Angie and the author all talk about situations and events from the point of view of the reef rays, the puhi, and Le Fe'e, the spirit of the ocean. In these cases the characters weigh the motives and desires of the non-humans against human motives and desires. The outcomes do appear suspicious: the humans almost always get what they want. Their saving grace is that this is often designed not be at the cost of any non-humans. And in the final showdown, Le Fe'e and the reef rays join the Pukui contingent against World Life Company.

Although Pua plays with fish and plants as objects throughout the book,

her passion is for the reef, its safety from the threat of escaped algae, and its continued role as her playmate. Angie, Fatu and Toma represent the more adult relationship, and regard the reef in a more serious light. It is their intent to safeguard the reef itself, which honestly seems to be for its own sake rather than its role as provider.

This intent is something I measure by the emotions I perceive in the characters, and is a vague thing to pin down in examples. Still, their few traditions -- kapu (taboo) to kill a reef dweller unless it is going to eat you or you are going to eat it, and tattoos that show and reflect the reef and the beings who live there -- are based on an alliance with the reef. Overall, I find more hope in Reefsong, and what future humans may shape on LeSaat, than I do in all but the Wanderground.

And so we come to one of the earliest written books in the study, now 16 years old. In it, characters always consult all of the animals, plants and land with which they interact, and do not directly affect non-humans without their consent. The humans ask for the opinion of, bargain with, receive help from, observe the actions of, pledge allegiance with, and just plain socialize with cats, trees, water, bushes, fish, ponies, ferns, etc. Humans and non-humans coexist; humans may center their community around each other, but, on a larger scale, all living things and all natural entities create a community together in Wanderground.

As I read and contemplated the seven novels in this study, I found almost no one who had ever read one of them; for the most part, I could

not discuss them with others. However, because Wanderground was one of the texts assigned in an environmental utopias course I took, I heard quite a bit of my peers' responses to it.

Almost all scorned the book, and would not have wanted to live in its setting. They felt that the women's psychic powers, on which almost all human/non-human interchange rests, were unrealistic, impossible, or, at best, stupid; that men were too thoroughly maligned and cast as hopeless; and that the book consistently used a saccharine tone.

Even though I would have to agree somewhat with comments regarding the tone of the book, it is the one piece of fully developed imagination I have read that not only describes but shows non-humans equal to humans in volition and action. At the heart of the plot is the fact that the earth herself has revolted, disabling machinery and electricity throughout the countryside. Humans and non-humans appear as partners, developing a new culture among themselves. I may doubt a future that includes psychic abilities of my own, but I would be content to live in the wanderground, where the norm is consideration and respect of other beings - whether I were plant, animal, rock, river or human.

I could live without too much sadness among the Kesh, or in Mundane, or on Lesaat with Pua and her family; those also could be my homes of hope. Bland Ata I would settle for - it is very peaceful. Mattapoisset and Maternas I will never call home.

My hope lies greatest in some deep tangle of all of these books, in a land where the plants grow lush, the buildings suit the ground they rest in, on or above, and the pathways are made of reused other-things, where we need no human Earth Advocate or Animal Advocate because humans, the earth and animals all communicate with each other, where buildings can be designed as whistles for the wind and humans act in the ways they learn from animals, where animals seek out humans because they like them and want to spend time with them, where humans pay attention to and follow the mysteries and knowledges of their dreams,

where the world “people” applies to all sorts of beings, organic and inorganic, and humans talk about, discuss, refer to and greet all these beings every day throughout their lives, where the human population is small and woven in among all different kinds of lands, where oak trees and donkeys and nightshades and ants and aunts and lions and little girls live as closely together as humans in an ocean of reef rays and coilers and candyfish and corals and puhi, all mixing and shifting and shuffling in and out of each other’s lives,

where humans would unpainfully stop other humans from hurting the land or sea around them, where stories are told from all different beings’ points of view and politics are argued with human assumptions being poked fun at, where other species prevail in arguments and the humans don’t always get what they want

most of all, where humans listen to the earth, listen to the animals, listen to the plants, where humans don’t talk so much, where they

ponder what they hear, where they act with respect towards the speakers and act-ers that surround them, everywhere, suspending humans immersed in a life far vaster and far richer than all but a few talk about in our world here and now - but hopefully a life that a rippling ribbon of people here and now wish for, even if they don't talk about it, and just perhaps, if we are lucky, are moving towards... with hope. Hope with me.

WORKS CITED AND CONSULTED

- Adams, Carol J. *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*. New York: Continuum, 1990.
- Alexander, Thea. *2150 A.D.* Tempe, AZ: Macro Books, 1971.
- Barr, Marleen S., ed. *Future Females: A Critical Anthology*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1981.
- Bartkowski, Frances. *Feminist Utopias*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1989.
- Bradley, Marion Zimmer. *The Ruins of Isis*. New York: Pocket Books, 1978.
- Bryant, Dorothy. *The Kin of Ata Are Waiting for You*. Berkeley: Moon Books, 1971 & New York: Random House, 1971.
- Callenbach, Ernest. *Ecotopia*. Berkeley, CA: Banyan Tree Books, 1975.
- Charnas, Suzy McKee. *Motherlines*. New York: Berkeley Books, 1978.
- Charnas, Suzy McKee. *Walk to the End of the World*. New York: Berkeley Books, 1974.
- Cheney, Jim. "Eco-Feminism and Deep Ecology." *Environmental Ethics*, Volume 9, Summer 1987.
- Crow, Charles L. "Homecoming in the California Visionary Romance." *Western American Literature*. Volume 24 (1), May 1989.
- Day, Phyllis J. "Earthmother/Witchmother: Feminism and Ecology Renewed." *Extrapolation: A Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy*, Volume 23(1), Spring 1982.

- Diamond, Irene and Orenstein, Gloria Feman, eds. *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*. San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1990.
- Eisler, Riane Tennenhaus. *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future*. Cambridge, MA: Harper & Row, 1987.
- Erickson, Ron. "A Mundane Utopia." *The Trumpeter: Journal of Ecosophy*. Volume 9 (1), Winter 1992.
- Forrest, Katherine V. *Daughters of a Coral Dawn*. Tallahassee, FL: Naiad, 1984.
- Gearhart, Sally Miller. *The Wanderground: Stories of the Hill Women*. Boston: Alyson, 1979. -
- Gilligan, Carol. *In A Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982.
- Gilman, Charolotte Perkins. *Herland*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1979.
- Grahn, Judy. *Mundane's World*. Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1988.
- Henderson, Janet "In Search of an Ecofeminist Utopia." *Ecofeminist Explorations (unpublished Master's Thesis)*. Missoula, MT: University of Montana, 1990.
- Hovanec, Carol P. "Visions of Nature in The Word for World Is Forest: A Mirror of the American Consciousness." *Extrapolation: A Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy*, Volume 30(1), Spring 1989.
- Jacobs, Naomi. "Beyond Stasis and Symmetry: Lessing, Le Guin, and the Remodeling of Utopia." *Extrapolation: A Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy*. Volume 29 (1), Spring 1988.

- Kessler, Carol Farley. "Woman on the Edge of Time: A Novel 'To Be of Use.'" *Extrapolation: A Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy*. Volume 28 (4), Winter 1987.
- Kheel, Marti. "The Liberation of Nature: A Circular Affair." *Environmental Ethics*. Volume 7 (2), Summer 1985.
- King, Ynestra. "Toward an Ecological Feminism and a Feminist Ecology," in Joan Rothschild, ed., *Machine Ex Dea: Feminist Perspectives on Technology*. New York: Pergamon Press, 1983.
- Klarer, Mario. "Re-Membering Men Dis-Membered in Sally Miller Gearhart's Ecofeminist Utopia The Wanderground." *Extrapolation: A Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy*. Volume 32 (4), Winter 1991.
- Lefanu, Sarah. *Feminism and Science Fiction*. Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989.
- Le Guin, Ursula K. *Always Coming Home*. New York: Harper & Row, 1985.
- Le Guin, Ursula K. *The Dispossessed*. New York: Harper & Row, 1974.
- Le Guin, Ursula K. *The Word for World is Forest*. New York: Berkeley Books, 1976.
- Leopold, Aldo. *The Sand County Almanac*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1966.
- McIntyre, Vonda. *Dreamsnake*. New York: Dell, 1978.
- Murphy, Patrick D. "Sex-Typing the Planet: Gaia Imagery and the Problem of Subverting Patriarchy." *Environmental Ethics*, Volume 10, 1988.

- Orr, Elaine. "Mothering as Good Fiction: Instances from Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*." *Journal of Narrative Technique*. Volume 23 (2), Spring 1993.
- Pearson, Carol S. "The Utopian Novels of Dorothy Bryant, Mary Staton and Marge Piercy." *Heresies*. Volume 13 (1), 1981.
- Pfaezler, Jean. "The Changing of the Avant Garde: The Feminist Utopia." *Science Fiction Studies* v. 15 (3), November, 1988.
- Piercy, Marge. *Woman on the Edge of Time*. New York: Random House, 1976.
- Regan, Tom. *The Case for Animal Rights*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983.
- Rodman, John. "Four Forms of Ecological Consciousness Reconsidered." Source unknown.
- Roessner, Michaela. *Walkabout Woman*. New York: Bantam Books, 1988
- Russ, Joanna. *The Female Man*. New York: Bantam, 1975.
- Severance, Carol. *Reefsong*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1991.
- Slonczewski, Joan. *The Door Into Ocean*. New York: Avon, 1986.
- Somay, Bulent. "Towards an Open-Ended Utopia." *Science Fiction Studies*, Volume 11 (1), 1984.
- Tschachler, Heinz. "Despotic Reason in Arcadia? Ernest Callenbach's Ecological Utopias." *Science Fiction Studies*, Volume 11 (3(34)), November 1984.
- Warren, Karen J. "Feminism and Ecology: Making Connections." *Environmental Ethics*, Volume 9, Spring 1987.

Wittig, Monique. *Les Guerilleres*. 1969. Trans. David Le Vay.
Boston, MA: Beacon, 1985.

Wu, Dingbo. "Understanding Utopian Literature." *Extrapolation: A Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy*. Volume 34 (3), 1993.

Wytenbroek, J.R. "Always Coming Home: Pacifism and Anarchy in Le Guin's Latest Utopia." *Extrapolation: A Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy*. Volume 28 (4), Winter 1987.

Zaki, Hoda M. "Utopia and Ideology in *Daughters of A Coral Dawn* and Contemporary Feminist Utopias." *Women's Studies*. Volume 14 (2), 1987.